A WEEK

IURY LIBEDINSKY

Marie Pawelczyk

A WEEK

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010

https://archive.org/details/weeklibe00libe

A WEEK

BY

IURY LIBEDINSKY

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

ARTHUR RANSOME

NEW YORK
B. W. HUEBSCH, INC.
MCMXXIII

COPYRIGHT, 1923, BY
B. W. HUEBSCH, INC.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

INTRODUCTION

It would be an extraordinary thing if out of an upheaval in the lives of 130 million human beings, an upheaval in which two quite different ways of looking at life were engaged in mortal combat, no new literature were to be born. It would, however, have been still more extraordinary if much of this new literature had appeared during the first years of the Russian revolution, when the feeling of all but the comparatively few conscious politicians was that they were somehow caught in a tornado. In those first years there were now and again fine, passionate pieces of political writing (some of which, indeed, are to be found in the speeches and pamphlets of Trotsky, who, almost alone of the actual revolutionary leaders has a real feeling for words). One or two ambitious diarists clutched at im-

mortality by writing down everything that happened to them in the conscious hope that in after years people would turn to them for historical information. At the very beginning of the revolution there were some fine poems by Blok. But Blok, like Trotsky and the diarists, had a foot in each of two worlds. All these had been writers before the revolution. All had been born too soon. Then there was a desperate output of "proletarian poetry," but, though it may have been written by proletarians, it certainly was not poetry. Ardent elderly revolutionaries had thought and written a lot about "proletarian culture" and they grabbed eagerly at the manuscripts of any writer who could be called a workman or a peasant and printed it with acclamation. But there were no real discoveries, and the verse was simply ordinary bad verse, full of irreproachable revolutionary sentiments. Of course there was the satirical verse of Demian Biedny, who early in the revolution published some amusing things, but, though he provided

an entertaining commentary on foreign and home affairs from a strictly orthodox Bolshevik point of view, together with a good deal of capable rhymed propaganda, he was but little concerned with the actual life of man under the revolution. He wrote a good deal too much, so that it is easy to under-estimate him, but he will certainly have his place in any political history of those years. Various sects of poets, of the kind that we know both in Paris and in London, rioted for a time and claimed that the revolution was theirs and that theirs was the poetry of revolution, just as the futurists shocked and puzzled the Moscow workmen by their efflorescence on the street hoardings and market booths. But they had been writing the same stuff before ever politics had reached them, and would have written for applauding drawing-rooms exactly what they now put forward as the proud result of "revolutionary freedom."

Of course what the revolution did, at once, was to revise all former literature. Every-

thing with which one was familiar now looked new and different, under a red light. "Samson and Delilah" became, suddenly, a revolutionary opera with the very spirit of the streets of Petrograd brought on the stage. Tchekhov became an antiquary, tenderly preserving under glass, in cotton wool, fragments of a life for ever gone. Even I, a stranger in the gates of the revolution, found that I was reading Milton with new eyes and seeing in a quite unaccustomed perspective Hazlitt, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey; it was as if this new revolution threw fresh lights and shadows on those men who had all been profoundly affected by the revolution of their day. I am afraid I felt at that time a slight impatience, almost discomfort, in reading certain other writers who had been wholly untouched by such events, and I am sure that many young Russians in the same way reviewed the literature they knew, though many, of course, like Konstantin Petrovitch in the story that follows, sought in

the literature of the past nothing but escape from the alien and disturbing present.

But in those first years there were no signs of the new literature that was to come. For one thing, the people who were to write it, children and striplings then for the most part, were feeling but had no tranquillity in which to remember their emotions. For another, even if the literature had been produced there would have been technical difficulties in its publication. There was very little paper, for example, and what paper there was was under Government Control, under the control of a government almost exclusively political and economic in its interests, which thought that in such a crisis as this, all mankind ought to be reading about Karl Marx. They needed paper for their own newspapers and propaganda and what paper was left over they were inclined to use in paying pious reverence to their revolutionary precursors. After all, no one could be quite sure. The

revolution might collapse at any moment; and, while they could, the revolutionaries printed as fast as possible, all the political books that could not have been printed under the old régime. It is only fair to say that in those days the demand from readers was for political books. A huge population was taking, temporarily, to politics, and wanted all that it could get. Both in the centre and in the provinces people pounced eagerly on every new pamphlet, and nothing, if in pamphlet form was too "craggy" for them "to break their minds upon."

It was not until the slackening of tension on the front and the growth of a sense of stability at home that people turned once more to literature for its own sake. At the same time, with the end of the civil war and the introduction of the New Economic Policy, technical obstacles between writers and readers largely disappeared. There came into existence again a host of private publishers and private bookshops, and the State Publishing House also addressed itself seriously to the publication of

other than purely political, scientific and educational books. Today, innumerable as they are, no shops in Moscow or Petrograd are more crowded than bookshops. I have seen people squabbling and pushing to get new books as in other countries I have seen elderly women risk their lives for bits of ribbon. This keenness of the reading public would be amazing if it were not so natural. During the last eighteen months or so people have been able for the first time to take breath and look about them after nine years of continual excitement and after the completest upheaval of almost every individual life. People are asking themselves, What, after all, has happened? And a crowd of new writers are answering that question in their own way with divers stories, dialogues, poems, in all of which is the consciousness of this extraordinary commotion, this "revaluation of all values," this wealth of contrast between monstrous event and tiny individual destiny. Nor can these new authors satisfy the demand. They are printed

in Moscow, in Petrograd, pirated in one place and another and in some cases even exported to Berlin and there printed again. I have seen copies of new volumes of poetry, for example, in which the simplified spelling of the revolution had been in Berlin corrected to the old orthography, so as to allow the huge émigré public, without offence to their eyes, to share in this new literature of the world they have left. As soon as the books are printed, on no matter what poor paper, with no matter what worn out, broken type, folded and sewn before the ink is dry, they are gone from the bookstalls. The only way to make sure of copies is to get a bookseller to set them aside for one as soon as they come in. In the ferment of literary excitement a new author can make a reputation with a single story in a magazine, so eagerly is every new thing canvassed and discussed.

Iury Libedinsky is one of these new writers and was unknown eighteen months ago. He

is extremely young, and has come to manhood with the revolution which began when he was still a boy. His story, "A Week" appeared in one of the literary "almanacs" which are now almost as popular in Russia as were the "Keepsakes," "Miscellanies" and "Garlands" of the early nineteenth century in England. It instantly set by the ears all that part of the political Russia which is interested in literature and was commented upon even by the papers of the émigrés in foreign capitals. Nor was this at all surprising. Libedinsky aimed so simply; he disregarded so completely the revolutionary *convenance* that all which is revolutionary is good and the counter-revolutionary *convenance* that all which is revolutionary is bad; his was so clearly an attempt to see rather than an attempt to describe; it had so obviously been written by its author for his own sake and without particular regard for the way in which it would affect anybody but himself. Neither of the conflicting parties could find themselves in this new looking-

glass precisely as they figured in their own imaginations. Yet none could disregard this honest piece of literary pioneering. It admitted so much damaging evidence that mere political propaganda would attempt to rebut or explain that it was fiercely denounced by some of the Communists as a counter-revolutionary work, though Bucharin and others warmly defended it. Libedinsky, whatever may be his political faith (and he is certainly, if not a Communist, one of those who are described in accounts of congresses as "sympathetic non-party") does not allow himself to look exclusively at the silver linings of clouds, and anybody who chose to omit what to Libedinsky is the most important thing of all could make use of scene after scene, paragraph after paragraph in this story as anti-Bolshevik propaganda. Libedinsky, at whatever risk, must have it all in (he is writing first for himself, and in the second place not for foreigners but for his own countrymen who would put it all in even if he left it out); the starving crowd

on the railway station and the elegant, cake-eating Commissar, picking his way among the vermin-ridden bodies, with care not to soil his polished boots; the cold horror of the execution of a batch of White Guards; the savage, vengeful cruelty of revolting peasants; he will have it all in; he will reject no possible data. But through it all there is one thing that he never for a moment lets himself forget, and that is that amazing will-to-good which, through a million devastating errors revolting sometimes to humanity, sometimes to mere pedestrian common sense, still shines, still makes honest observers impatient with the silly dismissal of the whole huge affair as an eruption of thieves, scoundrels and murderers.

In "A Week," Libedinsky paints on a small canvas an extraordinarily inclusive picture of all that inner life of the revolution at which it is difficult for a foreigner even to guess; he does this without any attempt at proving anything; and he deals with something quite out-

side that life of Moscow and Petrograd which has been described and re-described until people are utterly tired of the very names of those cities. In this last his story is typical of much of this literature which comes not from the centre but from the far periphery. It is not in the centre but out there in the Urals, in the Ukraine, in Siberia, where town and country are in closer contact, where the civil war was fought, where a thousand minor centres are working out their problems for themselves, that the abstractions, the crude generalisations of the revolution resolve themselves in concrete instances, fit material for art. In Moscow, to take a single example, you see mathematical figures and curves on squared paper illustrating the increase or decrease of the area sown; it is out there that you see human beings literally fighting for their lives to get the seed to the fields.

That is the motive of this story, which is an account of a single week in a small town in the foothills of the Urals, in the Spring of

1921, before the New Economic Policy and the abandonment of militant Communism had eased the extremely hostile relations between country and town. It is the story of one of those revolts of desperately resentful peasants, led by Whites against the Reds, and presently suppressed, which used to be dismissed in the Moscow newspapers in a paragraph of three or four lines in a column of other news; a very small affair. But into his account of it, Libedinsky has managed to work a large, carefully chosen gallery of revolutionary portraits. There is the "intellectual" Communist, Martuinov, the son of a rich manufacturer, held to the old life by a thousand invisible threads and tortured on the one hand by the kindly contempt with which he is regarded by the workmen Communists, and on the other hand by the alienation of his betrothed, who has turned to religion from the revolution in which she does not believe, reads the Apocalypse and looks for the end of the world; there is the vengeful Jew druggist who has had his

shop requisitioned and cannot go in or out of his house without seeing the Soviet placard flaming over it in place of his own name; the White officer, Repin; the broken, angry old Colonel Rostovtsev, with new green patches on the shoulders of his uniform tunic, where were once the prided epaulettes that the revolution snatched from him; there is Konstantin Petrovitch, the teacher of literature for whom life ended with Turgenev, who on principle has refused to work in the Soviet schools; there are three types of Tchekists, members of the Extraordinary Commission, two of whom end with deaths more painful than those to which they have condemned so many others; the old Cossack who when deeply moved has to get drunk but is the embodiment of a sort of sturdy common sense in the completest contrast with the visionary idealism of some of his associates; the girl revolutionary, Simkova, in whose mouth is all provincial Russia's criticism of Moscow, and in contrast to her the little puzzled school-teacher, Lisa Gratcheva, who

is not at all clever and becomes "revolutionary" only from simplicity and by force of circumstances; and then on the one hand Robeiko, with his consumption and his selfless political passion and on the other hand the time-serving Matusenko who would be a Communist under one régime and a devout orthodox churchman under another, but will get a safe job under either and cares only to keep his buttons polished and his skin whole and well filled. Not a character, not a chapter in the tale but contributes something to an understanding of the great stirring of men's minds and lives that has taken place in Russia during these last five years. With its unwillingness to blink unpleasant fact, its wide humanity, the thing is an antidote to newspaper reports which (as we who have to write them know) can seldom be more than the reports of the Brahmins who examined an elephant through watchmaker's glasses, and each assumed the whole was like the minute portion that he was able to see for himself. "A Week" is built

out of the very stuff of this new Russian life by one who has grown up with the revolution and feels and sees it as we outsiders can never hope to feel or see it, from within.

Indeed, so vivid, so intimate is much of the detail of the story that one realises with a shock through how much this boy must himself have lived; through what fires of experience he has preserved the feeling for loveliness, the extraordinary gentleness, that lifts the whole story far above the dust and hubbub of the political arena. It is perhaps to Korolenko that he owes the happy trick of never letting the reader forget that larger life of nature in which all lives are set, which goes on without accomodating itself to the events which happen to interest us at the moment, and will bring the Spring in its season regardless of any merely human convulsion. Libedinsky sees the lives of men as small things beside the revolution, and still smaller beside the relentless turn of the seasons, the inexorable alternation of night and day, sunset and sunrise.

Most of the people in whom he has waked our interest are dead before the end, and his point is that the story does not end with their deaths. The characters illustrate rather than are illustrated. Each shows a different facet of the revolution and it is with the convulsion of a whole people more than with the passions of individual persons that the author is concerned. Yet that point of his would be weakened, if his persons were merely symbols. And it is with tenderness and pity that he lifts from each in turn the veil of politics and shows them simply human beings, snatching at any straw of non-political experience. How true is his instinct in doing so, only those who lived through a revolution can know. Prematurely aged, as most of them are, they are children after all and happy with a little sunshine.

ARTHUR RANSOME

Postscript.

I have tried to retain in the English the new characteristic coinage of revolutionary lan-

guage in the barbarous names of institutions wherever I could do that without hampering narrative effect by the introduction of such momentary checks as must be given to the reader's mind by works like "Combrig" or "Combat," meaning Commissar of Brigade or Battalion. "Popeduc" and "Politdep" fairly represent in English "Narobras" or "Politotdel" in Russian.

A WEEK

I

In the spaces of mother-of-pearl, between the piles of grey motionless clouds, the joyful sky was turning a dark blue. For three days the Spring had been sunny, the streamlets had broken through the snowdrifts and were beginning to carry them out of the town, to the river, and the streets had become noisy and dirty. But on the fourth day the Spring dozed again, laid her head on her knees and went to sleep, sitting somewhere in a distant forest glade; and only once, before noon, the sun smiled on the earth and then went off again behind the motionless clouds. But the joyfulness of Spring remained; only it was behind everything, just as the sun was behind the grey, blue and pallid lilac clouds which, for hours, hung over the earth like grey wet stones.

If you were to climb past the railings and little houses of the outskirts, slipping in the sticky mud, to the hillock which the sun had already cleared of snow, where there is a solitary weather-beaten rock, and were then to look back, you would see below you the little town lying under the hillock, stretching all the way to the river, with its blocks of grey wooden houses. There are few people to be seen; probably all asleep; dogs bark, and with the Spring the cocks are crowing loudly. On the broad streets and in the narrow lanes glimmer the remnants of the last snow. There are few big two-storied houses, but many churches. Solitary factory chimneys pour into the sky endless ribbons of black smoke, and, far beyond the town, the ash falls on the snowdrifts.

The sturdy, dusty-grey watch-tower sent out, cracked and regular, one after another, five even blows into the dim silence, and, after two quiet minutes, in reply, singing sounds flew from the belfries, lingered in the air, and

fell, far beyond the town in the grey mist of the villages.

At this so quiet hour, when the sun, a dull-white spot, had long passed noon, people were coming together to the Circus building on the broad square. They were walking by the low railings, on the scattered snow-tracks, across the waste spaces where last year's withered thistles stick up through the snowdrifts, they were stepping across the street, full of the mud of Spring, and walking along the footways cut in the earth. They were hurrying, met each other, greeted each other sometimes, smiled at each other, men and women, more often young than old, in grey coats, in worn out blue and black overcoats. Different smiles, eyes, gait, manners, and yet there was something common to all of them, as if one and the same distant morning sun were lighting them all.

In the Circus it is quiet all day and the big grey rats slip noiselessly about the yellow twi-

lit arena. But now the double doors, on which hung tatters of old bills and announcements, were opened wide; the mutilated words and sentences cut off short, spoke of something past and gone. It was lighter now in the Circus, and the people poured into their places, rising higher and higher round the arena, and filled the huge building with a suppressed noise of steps and voices.

Two persons appeared at the round table standing in the middle of the arena. Single voices from all parts of the Circus threw names to them, and then, by the will of hundreds of lifted hands, Comrade Klimin, a man in a soldier's coat, whose features, but for his fine, quietly observant eyes, were indistinct in the half light of the Circus, announced from the middle of the arena:

"Comrades, I declare the meeting of the Town District of the R. C. P. (Russian Communist Party) open. On the agenda list is a report of the President of the Soviet of Public Economy on the economic situation of the

district. No objections? . . . I call upon Comrade Ziman."

The Circus grew quieter and quieter, and the assembly of people, like a huge, grey, affectionate beast lay at the feet of the President, and its many-eyed stare was fixed upon that other, the one who was also standing in the middle of the arena, and with a nervous hand was crumpling scraps of paper.

Inaudibly, dully raising his voice, on figures, poods of corn, sazhins of wood, the number of locomotives, huge sums of money, numbers of days and weeks, Ziman made his report. But all listened greedily, and all understood —the talk was of house-keeping, goods, fuel, food, and question after question, coveys of little scraps of paper, flew on to the table of the Præsidium.

Ziman told how the town was far from the big main railways and connected with the rest of Russia only by a 500-verst branch line. The district was almost without forests, it had very little coal of its own, and the railway had

almost ceased working. And it had been a bad harvest, the corn-collection had taken the last, and if no seed were forth-coming at sowing time, there would be famine in town and country.

Every one knew what those words meant; hunger would urge the peasantry to senseless, violent revolt, the factories would cease working, the workmen would scatter, and the robber bands who wander far off in the steppes would grow bold, approach the railway and spoil the track. To bring seed, fuel would be necessary. Fuel was prepared in the district of Nizhni-Elansk, in the hills, 200 versts away by railway and could not be brought in a week. The collapse of the sowing campaign was almost inevitable. And the speaker called for stoicism, but his words were dry, did not sink into the meeting, and hung unwanted and homeless like little bits of paper in the wind.

Ziman ended, and a Red Army soldier with a browless, broad red face, opened discussion of his report. He said he had fought on the

front for two years for the Soviet Government, and in the villages everything was getting worse and worse. They were injuring the villages by the corn-collection, there was a lot of scoundrelism in all these economy committees, food committees and soviets of public economy. It had become extremely hard for a poor man to live. We have cleaned the people out of corn and now we howl about it. Ah! He wrung his hands and returned to his place.

"What? Are we to be hungry again?" A second began tearfully from the middle of the arena. He was thin, with a scar on his neck, and he took a long time in telling how hard it was to live on a ration of forty pounds of flour a month, with a family. "There's thievery going on," he added viciously at the end of his speech.

But there were also other speeches and more of these than of the first kind. Workmen and Red Army soldiers walked excitedly into the middle of the arena and, hampered by the unaccustomed attention of the crowd, they made

clumsy speeches, upbraided Ziman, but agreed that they ought to hold out stoically. To sit with folded hands, there was no stoicism in that, and they sought a way out, feeling for it, like blind men. But the meeting did not understand their disconnected words, and one orator disputed with the one who had spoken before him, though both meant the same thing.

And Ziman in the end stopped making notes of criticisms for his concluding speech: small, wretched, he jerked his head with nervousness, listening to the reproachful, seeking speeches, and was worried precisely by those of the speakers who saw somewhere a way out. He did not see it, and muttered, angrily, "Demagogy. . . . Meeting stuff. . . ." And the orators went on spasmodically bumping into glass walls, and could not tell the meeting of their clear plans, but talked of some detail or other, of how, from somewhere, "It would be possible to get axes." The meeting grew excited, and people shouted from their places,

regardless of the President's bell. And then a man above middle height, round-shouldered, came out, and took an old blue cap from his square head, disclosing a high forehead with a deep wrinkle in it.

"I call on Comrade Robeiko," said the President, and the meeting tried to be silent in order to hear a speech that would not be loud.

For Robeiko must not speak. He has consumption of the throat. He had not meant to speak, but had listened, and for a long time had been thinking, "Ziman is helpless and cannot see the way out which many of the speakers see but cannot put into words." He thought regretfully, Why had the Party Committee brought this report to a big meeting? And all the time he had waited for somebody to name the way out, to put it into words and save Robeiko from unnecessary suffering. . . . For Robeiko must not speak. Sounds tear his throat into rough red bleeding scraps. But he must say a little, just a few words, and the

question will be clear, and all will have bright faces, for all will know how to name the road, the way out, that many dimly see.

He began to speak in a low voice, fearing to awake the pain which just then was slumbering deep in his throat. . . . But nothing could be heard, people stretched out their necks like martyrs, and Robeiko made up his mind . . . his voice, as it were, made a jump, and all heard every word, and all had grateful faces. But every word, like a sharp splinter of glass, rose to his larynx and tore into scraps its delicate fibre and it hurt him so that tears slipped from his eyes, the sweat stood on his forehead, and his voice clanged and broke.

He said that Ziman had told the meeting the truth and that they ought not to reproach him for this. For not Ziman had created this truth; he had told them of the danger, and for that they owed him thanks. Only there was no need to lose their heads; they needed only to look about them and somewhere a way out

would be found. It was necessary quietly and calmly to look about them. Surely the party, in its day, had found the way out from worse holes than this. Their strength and wisdom lay in quiet investigation and determined action.

There was a way out. Many saw it but did not know how to talk of it. It was clear enough that the whole difficulty was fuel. If they could get a little fuel they could at once bring wood from Nizhni-Elansk. "And if we have the wood we can in a week bring the seed for the sowing. Everything depends on fuel, on a few hundred cubic sazhins of wood. . . . Where can we get them?"

Obviously, there were many gardens in the town, and twelve versts outside, at the monastery, there were big woods. There was wood for them and plenty of it. In a week the fuel from Nizhni-Elansk would be there and they could begin to bring the seed. But all must be done quickly and decisively; they must themselves take axes and saws, stand at the

head, compel the slackers and the bourgeoisie, bring in the Red Army and all the workers. Only, they must hurry; if in two weeks the seed should be here, then in a month the fields would be sown.

But his speech was cut short by a dry, breaking cough. For a minute, for two, he coughed, and the crowd waited eagerly, many, many sympathetic faces gleamed before him, and he coughed on, twisted himself with coughing, and all saw it, were silent, and only took breath, first one and then another.

The little town under the unchanging sky slept as it were with a heavy after-dinner sleep. In every house geraniums shone in the windows, and on their beggarly but pretentious leaves lay flowers like purple and red flies. Oh, how many of these ash-coloured wooden boxes, street upon street of them, how stuffy and close in each one of them! Many grim ikons in the high corner and on little tables, covered with crocheted table-cloths, albums bound in velvet.

Dirt in the kitchens, black-beetles running on the walls, and flies dismally buzzing on the window-panes.

The life of the people who live in these crowded houses is like a grey September day, when a drizzle of rain sounds monotonously on the window, and through the panes, lined with the running drops, you can see a grey railing and a red calf wandering in the mud. So, year after year, this life goes on. Every day early in the morning elderly women milk cows, go to the market with baskets, and then in the kitchen after dinner wash the greasy dishes. And bald-headed men with dull eyes, in old patched breeches and mended boots, go to their work, buy and sell something or other, and work at some industry, each one alone in a dark room. On Sundays the women smooth their hair tightly down, put on purple, yellow or blue dresses, take the children to church, and in the evening gather together to drink tea while the men get drunk with vodka or beer and bump their foreheads on the table.

All of them, at that hour when, dismally drooping its wings, the sound of the bell calling to the Saturday evening services floated mournfully over the town, all of them hid dislike for those who were meeting in the Circus, and this timorous dislike united the whole town in a single black cloud invisible by men. . . .

At this hour Raphael Antonovitch Senator went for a walk, Raphael Antonovitch who lived in the two-storied stone house on the ground floor of which was a chemist's shop.

They had requisitioned the chemist's shop. . . . They had taken down the black board with its affectionately inviting gold letters, "The Rozhdestvensky Drug Store, R. A. Senator." And now, instead of that, insolently, from a red board, black letters were shouting, "Health Department. Communal Drug Store, No. 1."

Raphael Antonovitch stood on the sandy hillock, drank in all the hidden dumb dislike that poured out of the little houses, dissolved in it his own bitter resentment and hatred, and

silently sent it all in the direction of the Circus where that incomprehensibly hostile life was going on. A little stout man in a grey coat and a worn hat (one of those hats nicknamed "Good Day and Goodbye") he stood for a long time on the hillock. Little malicious eyes glittered under the brim of his hat, and when he turned round and went slowly off a bit of fat red neck showed and on it a lot of short black and grey hairs.

He helped his wife in the house-work, asthmatically cut wood, took the hogwash to the cow, and while his wife was milking it silently watched the white stream running from under her fingers into dark milky froth. . . . And the regular sound of milking, the peaceful grunting of the pigs behind the railing, the perfume of the cosy, twilit cowshed, all this comforted him and he told his wife:

"I have been at the Khanzhins! Their brother has come from Tula. He says that the end is soon coming. The people are revolting against the Bolsheviks, the Poles are wanting

to fight again, and even the workmen in Moscow. . . ."

"God in His mercy grant it," murmured his wife, and Raphael Antonovitch walked up and down the yard with his hands behind his back, counting, as his custom was, the logs left over from the building of the house, for fear lest some should have been stolen.

But, when the grey cloudy day, hiding the joy of Spring so deeply that it was as if it did not exist, ended in a scarlet sunset, and the sun, melting the clouds, gave the earth the last gold of its slanting evening rays, and went off somewhere behind the houses, behind the woods, behind the fields, behind the yellow sandy hillock, and when the clouds hanging over the sunset rejoiced with nervous tenderness at something momentary and fugitive and accompanied the sun with a trembling of elusive singing tones, then by the dark staircase past the dirty water-closet and wash-tub, hurriedly, Raphael Antonovitch fled to his own room and groaned with his asthma.

For, at this scarlet hour of sunset, the "Internationale" proudly floated from the Circus, and, with the power of hundreds of voices was carried over the town to the evening sun, like a red avenging angel, and Robeiko would be coming home at once, for he had taken lodging in the house of Raphael Antonovitch, who did not like meeting Robeiko and was afraid of him.

II

Under the quiet light of an electric lamp, in a study furnished in oak, the meeting of the Party Committee began. Robeiko made a short report. He told the comrades of his plan for getting wood. But they were inattentive, talked among themselves in loud whispers, during the report, and smiled friendlily at each other. It was pleasant after a whole day of exhausting, nervous work, to see the familiar faces of their comrades. And consequently the flaming appeals of Robeiko were quenched like sparks falling in water. No one seconded his suggestions, but, when he had finished the report, Ziman proved at length that the whole project was impracticable, that the melting of the streams would prevent the bringing of the wood to the railway, and that there were not enough saws, axes or carts. . . .

Small, like an unpretentious dull figure out of a ledger, he caught by the wing Robeiko's flying ideas.

Then Karaulov objected, the military Brigade Commander, an old Cossack with a dark yellow face, framed in a thin little beard. He puffed out clouds of smoke from his pipe and muttered in a dull voice, "There are a lot of bandits hanging about round the town . . . and here are you proposing to take the Red Army soldiers twelve versts away. For without them you will not cut down the monastery woods. With mobilised bourgeois and half-dead Soviet employees, you will not get far. . . ."

And Robeiko, lacerated by his cough, and spattering the rich, flowered purple carpet with spittle and green mucus, replied to Ziman with figures from a note-book and with a hoarse voice told Karaulov that there was no other way out, that the revolution demanded . . . that they would have to take the risk.

"You risk that they will take the town, cut

the Communists to pieces, cut off the district from the centre for several months . . ." distinctly, maliciously, in a voice not loud but audible by all, said Karaulov and then suddenly raised his voice and cried angrily, "What are you fooling about, Robeiko? Causing a revolt is no sort of joke. Ask Klimin, and he, as head of the Tcheka [Tcheka is short for the Russian words meaning Extraordinary Commission, the Revolutionary Police dealing with Counter-Revolution, Banditism, Espionage etc., etc.] will tell you what unrest there is just now in the villages."

But Klimin was inattentive and silent. He was thinking of something happy and serene, and his eyes were merry and tender. He started at hearing his name, left his dreams and with unconscious dislike followed Robeiko's words, fully agreed with the quiet objections of Ziman, with the disgusted exclamations of Karaulov, and everything that Robeiko said seemed the result of his invalid fantasy.

"You must exert your wills, to get out of the

blind alley. . . . Otherwise we shall have the fields unsown!"

And, coughing, Robeiko pointed with his hand to the darkness of the window. Klimin followed his hand with a glance and looked the night in the eyes; the night was looking simply and sternly into the room, and Klimin imagined the boundless breadth of the wide country, covered by the quiet canopy of the night. The fields waking under the darkening snow-drifts, the fields waiting for the sowing, the mouzhiks [peasants] gathering in black throngs on fine days on the benches by the cottage doors, and talking of the weather, or the harvest, and then remembering that the granaries were empty, that there was no seed, and separating silently, anxiously waiting for help from the town, while with each day of waiting a dark hatred of the Communists, of the food committees, of the Soviets, was rising in their hearts.

And Klimin suddenly understood why Robeiko burned and trembled, understood that

there was "no way out," and instantly his practical clear judgment awoke, clearsightedly taking in the whole project, and Klimin thought out in his own mind exactly how to realise it, and, with strong, sonorous voice, he now supported Robeiko.

Robeiko was quite unable to speak, took breath, half-lying on the soft divan, and nodded his head with a smile, listening to the voice of Klimin who instantly attacked Ziman with practical suggestion; when they voted Karaulov alone, "contra," lifted his big strong hand with its crooked frost-distorted fingers. The other members of the Party Committee were alight with that same steady, quiet fire that burned in Klimin's words.

Immediately after the sitting of the Party Committee, the Commission met to which had been assigned the task of realising the project for getting wood. Its members were Klimin, Robeiko, Karaulov and Ziman.

Tomorrow, under the guidance of the Com-

mission, by the will of the Party, work would begin.

Tomorrow in the newspaper, the leading article would shout to everybody of the danger of famine, of the need of action.

Tomorrow at meetings and assemblies the military Commissars and agitators would explain to the attentive Red Army soldiers that if they wanted to see the fields sown they would have to go and cut wood.

Tomorrow from all the stores Ziman would collect saws and axes while the Communal Economy Committee would mobilise carts.

Tomorrow Robeiko, with extreme pain for his throat, would carry through the Trade Union Council a proposal for the mobilisation of the members of the Trades Unions, and in the factories the general meetings of the workmen would pass clumsy resolutions. . . . Tomorrow!

Over the town, over the endless white snow-

drifts, over the hills, noiselessly passed the blue-eyed moonlit night. The evening was disturbed and windy, the clouds swept swiftly between stars and earth, the belt of sunset flamed scarlet. The wind shook the name-board and it sang a squeaky song, while its black shadow swung to and fro on the footway. And then the wind drove off the clouds and dropped. It turned a little frosty. Empty streets; one could see from end to end of them; loud steps of chance passers-by; and the sky deep and starry as in winter.

Klimin went out into the open air and took a deep breath. He felt joyful, because one could smell the perfume of the sleepy breathing of the Spring, dozing in the distant glade, in the forest.

Where should he go? Dawn was close at hand, it was insensibly stealing from behind the high houses, and the night was slowly paling, as if some one were lighting the street with a big lantern far away. Soon it would be already morning and work would begin

again. And with cheerful, youthful strides he went off through the empty streets to the Tcheka, to sleep till morning on the divan in his office, and, in the morning, once again to set to work.

He wanted to eat, and still more he wanted to sleep, and scraps of sentences jingled in his head, the voices of the comrades, their faces, the steady look of Robeiko, Ziman standing drawing on a scrap of paper and Karaulov with a smile tapping quietly on the floor with his huge foot, in a yellow military boot.

The town was in profound silence, and there were no lights visible at that late hour of the night. Only the two-story building of the Tcheka threw light on the blue snowdrifts, and on the watchful sentinels on guard at the entrance. And inside the building, in the empty rooms, lit by the deathly clear electric light, were frozen chairs, tables, cupboards, and it seemed as if they were numb, in a light sleep from which they would easily awake.

The officer on duty at the Tcheka, the In-

vestigator, Gornuikh, was writing something, bending over the table. His face was dark, broad, with big cheek-bones and deep-set eyes, and a shaggy cap of hair hung over his forehead. At first sight he seemed elderly, but, when you approached him from the side and observed the lines of his mouth, the soft oval of his face, it was clear that he was still quite young.

He wanted to sleep, to stretch his legs under the table, lay his head on the arm of the chair and drop into careless, pleasant sleep. But he must not sleep, for in the sleeping town, over the breadth of the sleeping country, in which are so many woods, ravines and dark unknown ways, Gornuikh alone was sleepless like a sentinel at his post. At any moment the telephone might ring, he might be called to the direct telegraph. . . . Sleep was not to be thought of.

But Gornuikh for two days and nights had not slept for a minute. There had been an operation last night, a whole series of searches,

and, returning on horseback through the empty streets, Gornuikh had breathed the frosty morning air, and had thought of how he would undress and lie down on his bed, but, at the Tcheka they had stopped him unexpectedly, and he had had to remain on duty in the place of a comrade who had fallen ill. Swearing hard and with feeling, Gornuikh had taken on the duty and all night had not dozed for a moment. Several times the telephone had rung, and secret cipher telegrams had been brought from the telegraph. As the night wore on his weariness increased, the lines ran together in his eyes, and he stopped writing and listened to the regular noise of the ventilator, and watched the dark blue square of the window. His eyes closed of themselves, and from all sides a soft cloud of images, voices, rustlings and noises enveloped him. The ventilator made a noise, and its noise was like the noise of the tall grass stirred by the wind, the tall green grass that crushes under the feet . . . a girl in white was walking in the

grass and it rustled and murmured under her feet. Her face . . . he had seen it somewhere, known it somewhere. . . . Still a child, he had seen her in a girl of the steppes, but how light her movements, how scarlet, how sweet her lips. . . .

The sound of an opening door reached his ears, and he suddenly awoke, cursed himself for dozing, and the young dream slipped tracelessly away and was instantly forgotten.

A knock at the door? A telegram? A summons?

No. It was Klimin. Gornuikh knew his step. They greeted each other. Klimin relit his cigarette that had gone out in the street.

And, following Klimin into the inner office, Gornuikh heard of the three meetings at which Klimin had been present, heard of Ziman's report, of Robeiko's speech, of the meeting of the Party Committee.

"And what did Karaulov say?" he asked anxiously.

And struggling in pleasant morning sleep-

iness, like a fly in scented jam, Klimin told his story, and ended it with a sleepy yawn. Gornuikh silently nodded his head. He went to his own room, took from the shelf a fat portfolio of current work, and began carefully to look through several dossiers.

Two years had already gone by since the revolution had torn Gornuikh as a seventeen-year old lad from the dull factory, and the Party had sent him to work in the Tcheka. He could beat a chisel with a hammer without looking at his hand and without a fear of smashing it, and he had the same confidence in himself and in the results of his work. He never spoke at meetings, and very rarely in the gatherings of the Party Group.

Gornuikh was always full of wide-awake anxiety. He knew how to connect every crime with those disturbances unnoticeable by the majority, which, like deep submarine currents, are perpetually brewing in the people, toss themselves from village to village, through markets and fairs, and stir the many thousands

of the townsfolk. And sometimes it seemed to him that he himself and the thousands of the comrades were walking on a thin, fragile crust of ice, beneath which was surging angry water ready to carry away and drown everything. . . . And so, when Klimin told him of Karaulov's protests, he nodded his head with approval, and, looking through the last cases and the bulletins of information, he said to himself, "Good fellow, Karaulov!"

Imperceptibly, delicately, but none the less with insistent force, the pale dawn took possession of the room and made unnecessary and pitiable the light of the electric lamp.

The sun rose, not hot, but scarlet and bright, and threw yellow patches on the floor of the room. Greedily pulling at his cigarette, which did not seem strong enough, Gornuikh swore angrily because his head ached after the sleepless night, and his weary body begged for rest. The working day in the Tcheka was already beginning; typewriters were tapping alertly, chasing each other. And from outside, into

the life of the Tcheka, every minute, now in one room, now in another, broke the ringing of the telephone bells. . . .

Close by Klimin's ear the silver telephone bell rang, and, vexedly shaking his finger at Gornuikh, Klimin took down the instrument. From far, far away came words, incomprehensible, as if written on rough paper. And the voice, though long inaudible, transformed by the telephone, became suddenly recognisable, familiar. . . .

And Gornuikh noticed how Klimin's face joyfully lightened, and how it grew clear that he was still young, though the skin of his face was grey and there were many wrinkles under his eyes. But a smile of white teeth brought the dawn into his face, and suddenly he was young, and tenderly confused. "What is the matter with him?" thought Gornuikh.

"Good morning! Good morning! . . . Long from Moscow? At the railway station? Send horses? Good. . . . I'll come myself." He stood up from the table and hung up the

instrument. "Comrade Gornuikh, here is Simkova come from Moscow, bringing literature. I have no time to spare for the moment. We'll talk later. . . ."

And he was already running down the staircase into the yard.

The horse flung up the Spring mud from the road and people's voices sounded noisy and cheerful. . . . And Klimin, after long, long months was careless and happy, just as if some one had taken a dustcover from his soul. It had seemed that during these last months he had thought of nothing but work, that he had lived from day to day in its ceaseless rhythm, and only now he understood that all that time she had been present in the furthest corner of his mind.

He had met her first at a meeting of the Party Committee; she had golden hair carelessly wound into a lump, surrounding her head with a gold aureole, and falling over her eyes and her severe, serious forehead with its

wrinkle in the middle. They met often in Party work and he knew that she was looking after culture and education in the Political Department, and that before the revolution she had been a village schoolmistress, and had entered the Party in 1918. She had retained from her teaching the habit of speaking loudly, clearly, with affectionately persuasive, protective intonations, as if she were talking with her pupils. And during her reports, Klimin often ceased to understand the words, and only listened to the soft rise and fall of her voice and admired the joyful blue smile that lived in her eyes, a smile that did not harmonise with the severe expression of her mouth. And now and again he caught himself watching the movement of her strong little hand, that replied so firmly to a handshake, the mechanical movement of her long fingers, in the light touch of which was to be divined so much delicacy hidden from men. Catching himself, with slight annoyance, he had thrown off these ideas.

But like this, rosy-cheeked, healthy, tall, carrying her gold-haired head on her well-knit body, he had not known her long. The typhus epidemic that seized the town laid her for six weeks in a hospital. And, swallowed up in a feverish struggle with plots, banditism and typhus, he almost forgot her, and, meeting her after her illness, had not known her at first. She had grown pale, literally bloodless, her cheeks and lips had faded, and her shaved head seemed naked and fragile. Her eyes had grown larger and more transparent, and weariness after her severe illness remained in them for a long time.

Often, Klimin noticed, she went to sleep during some report or other, laying her pink shaven head on her arm, and then started up, a weary smile lighting her eyes. Sometimes, after the meetings, they talked of politics, of the life of the Party, of current work, and soon adopted the comradely "thou" that joins the Communists of a huge country in a single united family. But not only had there been

no words of love between them; there had been none of friendship even, and indeed there had been no time to think of personal experiences—work was too feverish and left too little leisure. Only, before her departure, in the moment of hurried leave-taking, a profound youthful desire had whispered to Klimin to kiss her smiling lips.

She rarely smiled, and her quiet laugh he heard for the first time now, in the midst of the bustle and hurry of the railway station, as he helped her to carry her bundles of literature. He saw her now quite different from what she had been: she had browned and grown thinner; her hair had grown again; her movements seemed quicker and she laughed with a quiet happy laugh. Hurriedly replying to her questions, he told her of the current work of the Party Committee, of the general state of affairs in the district, of the project for getting wood. . . . And, as they drove into the town along the road, silvery and glistening with snow and mud, Klimin caught himself feel-

ing that there was something or other he had not told her, the most important of all.

In the crowd that pressed together on the narrow station platform, among the Red Army men on leave with their weather-beaten faces, and the peasants losing their heads in the unaccustomed bustle of the station, two other people also met, and after they had greeted each other, one of them said:

"Look! The President of the Tcheka . . . there, with a woman."

"And she?"

"Of the Party. . . ." The one who replied was a fat mouzhik with a big red beard, in the long sheepskin coat of a sledge driver, with a whip in his hands and a worn fur cap on his head, from beneath which drops of sweat rolled on his forehead.

The other—well-built, in a short yellow fur coat tightly enclosing his strong body, and a black Red Army cloth helmet with a big red star. He had blue eyes and a handsome sensitive mouth. . . . On his sleeve were sewn

a star and two chevrons—but in his walk, his carriage, in every turn of the head was the regular officer. He had just arrived and had a travelling bag in his hand. His eyes looked carefully and with enmity at Klimin and Simkova, observing and marking their every movement.

"Let's get along quickly. . . . I have found a room in the house of some one here . . . one of the Jews. But he helps us, gives money, and twice saved me and hid me. What sort of documents have you got?"

"I am travelling from the District Staff to be at the disposal of the local War Commissariat as a military specialist. . . . My name . . . Repin, Boris, and in my service record, two years of work in the Red Army. Officially thanked therefore. . . ."

They were already driving through the streets and from time to time the red-haired one bent down from the driver's seat and talked to Repin:

"And we did not expect you. . . . As soon

as I heard that they had destroyed your organisation, I thought—that's the end, I shall not see you again. . . . Small military strength here now. . . . Scattered through the villages and factories. . . . Now the peasantry are for us. . . . There is no seed in the villages. . . . With God's help we'll give them a thrashing. . . ."

III

It was still frosty in the streets, as it is in early morning in early Spring. The cool, red sun hung low on the horizon; in western rooms, in dark corners, were lingering the remains of the night's darkness when the Secretary of the Politdep [Political Department] had already come to work and was writing down his name on the paper that lay before the sleepy man who was on duty . . . his name, "Matusenko." . . . Each letter of his signature was round, clear, finished, and only to the last Matusenko added a little thin, timorous tail.

Taking off his coat and hanging it up, Matusenko smoothed his hair with a comb and went into the office of the Chief; there stood his tidy little table, covered with pink blotting paper. Matusenko looked into the Chief's ink-

pot—was there plenty of ink? He tried the Chief's pen—a bad pen—Matusenko changed it, sorted the papers on the Chief's table, and looked at the minute shorthand of Martuinov, the assistant chief of the Politdep.

Matusenko was short, in bell trousers, carefully pressed, with rings on his fingers, and a broad, fresh-complexioned face, on which a smile was always fading away, a smile like the little flourish that Matusenko added to his signature, artificial and timorous. On his clean tunic, of military pattern, was an enamelled Communist star. Today was Sunday, and the typists and shorthand-writers, a merry noisy lot of people, would come to the Politdep only at eleven. But Matusenko always held himself aloof from them, or rather, simply did not notice them, did not consider their existence, just as he did not consider the existence of objects and animals that did not concern him, or that of all the people whom he considered below him in rank, like the Red Army

soldiers and the school-teachers who came to the Politdep.

But to make up for that, Matusenko thought a great deal about those who stood above him in the service, beginning with Golovlev, the Chief of the Politdep, and ending with Lenin and Trotsky. Chiefs also he estimated variously: some pleased him, others not; some he feared and did not understand, others he understood and did not fear; but in general he thought a lot about his chiefs and followed them with his little eyes.

Matusenko did not like Golovlev, who was noisy, rough, with unshaven chin and untidy dress. On one occasion Matusenko was going to help Golovlev on with his coat, but he broke away from that affectionate embrace, looked round with amused surprise and spoke words in the highest degree offensive, unpleasant, and, worst of all, incomprehensible:

"Comrade Matusenko! Why are you doing this? Aren't you a Communist? Who asked you to be a lacquey?"

"Obviously," decided Matusenko, "Golovlev is a low fellow, a workman, makes grammatical mistakes in writing, and, when he gets angry, swears indelicately."

But, though Matusenko disliked and feared Golovlev, Golovlev was the Chief, and that meant that one had to submit and with a smile listen to his coarse reproofs. . . . Often Matusenko mused over this strange order of things as a result of which he, a well-brought-up, educated man, having the title of military clerk, had to obey the uneducated hooligan, Golovlev.

It was true that the Republic was named "Workers' and Peasants'," and Golovlev was a worker, but in the bottom of his soul Matusenko thought that all these names, "Socialist Federated Republic," all these signs and watchwords, were the same sort of official things as the title of the Emperor, which Matusenko knew by heart.

The coming of Martuinov broke Matusenko's

reveries, and he replied to Martuinov's polite greeting with a bow and a sweet smile.

Martuinov was altogether different from Golovlev, gracious, neat, always shaved, badly dressed, it was true, but at that Matusenko was always surprised.

He never shouted, and indeed blushed when he had to give an order.

"Gentlemanly education, studied in the Gymnasium," thought Matusenko with respect. But Martuinov always felt uncomfortable when the officious Matusenko took it into his head to get his rations for him and to carry them himself to his lodgings.

But Martuinov was too much occupied in thinking about the revolution, Communism, his own life and that of mankind, and did not observe at all that the officious and humble Matusenko had long ago studied Martuinov's whole being, had studied it and understood it after his fashion.

And behold Matusenko in a quiet, gentle

voice, asking Martuinov "Why do people believe in God?" or "What is Imperialism?" or "When will there be a world-wide Communist Revolution?" And Martuinov would grow animated and begin to answer the questions, and thought of Matusenko, "a knowledge-seeking fellow . . . only without enough self-respect or self-confidence." He did not know that Matusenko had the utmost self-confidence, knew his own road through life, and was watching everything attentively, like a wild animal, and did not listen at all to Martuinov's long explanations.

For Martuinov the days followed each other in a swift procession, and the long Winter of the Urals had passed without his knowing it.

In Autumn, on the threshold of the Winter, it had seemed to him that he would not live through it, and here it was, gone already and Martuinov was once more on the edge of existence. Spring had come, and with extraordinary joy he had felt, suddenly, that she was

soothing him affectionately with tender hand, like an elder sister, and kissing him with a warm kiss.

Today as usual the military Commissars came to the Politdep (many had incorrectly understood that last circular letter) and the Commander of the battalion of the Tcheka, a handsome young fellow, in red breeches and elegant tunic, who as his custom was, cavilled suspiciously over every detail, seeing in everything the bureaucratism of the Politdep, said with a good-humoured laugh as he went off, "All right, Comrade Martuinov, yours to command—ours to obey, . . . but it's bureaucratism all the same." The officious Matusenko flashed across his eyes with papers for signature; there was some school-teacher standing there making a report and saying that he would not go to work—no boots—pointing to his wet snowboots. . . . But all this, once upon a time interesting even in its details, lit up by the revolution, today was dull and te-

dious. And Martuinov often went out on the stone steps, from which the snow was melting, and blinked blissfully in the sunlight.

After dinner in the noisy Soviet refectory came some free time, rare for Martuinov; there was no lecture or meeting. He walked slowly to his lodging through the dirty, cheerful streets, and did not notice that he was getting his feet wet and that by his slow steps he was interfering with the boys who were playing at knucklebones on the drying pavements.

He walked and, as usual, thought. The houses he had known from his childhood, the tedious nameboards, and the grey railings of his native town waked memories of his past life, of his family who had fled to Siberia, of his schoolfellows, for the most part White Guards, and of the strange fate that had brought him, a "gentleman's son," brought up in the comfort of a bourgeois family, into the ranks of the Communist Party, whose outlook on the world had become his, and to whose

great cause he was so warmly devoted, in spite of which it was as if glass walls separated him from the rest of the Party, and made him lonely and gave him much bitter suffering.

And he thought of her who lived here in the town, by the old church, of her whom he loved and still passionately desired, though she was far, far away, separated from him by the revolution.

The last time he had seen her was in the street in Winter. Out of the white, glittering curtain of falling snow, her trim figure had suddenly appeared; there, close, close to him was her face, snowflakes in her hair, her subtle almond-shaped black eyes. She had seen him: joy burned in her eyes, and then they clouded over with gloom, and she passed by, and in remembering her, loved and alone desired, he murmured words of affection, and these words, heard by no one, fell irrevocably, like pearls into the dark water of a deep well.

They had lived like this a whole year in the same town, separated by a few blocks of

houses, near and at the same time far away. . . .

And now when he came home to his lodging, he looked out of the window and tried to see, over there on the hill, where the bulk of the old church was clearly visible, the house in which she lived, and he imagined her cosy room, hung with beloved engravings, and, in the corner, in the old image-case, the dark stern pictures of the saints.

Martuinov came home mechanically, threw off his coat, and, as if he were waking up, looked about him.

A bed, a bare table, with crumbs of bread on it. Books lying on the chair, and general emptiness and untidiness, as if in an uninhabited room. And for a whole year, immersed in his work, Martuinov had lived in this room.

The sight of the room was unpleasant to him. "Shall I go out somewhere?" he thought aloud, "but whither, and to visit whom?" For, in spite of his devotion to the revolution,

in spite of his intimate work with them, he had no friends among the Communists.

Once only during the Winter, Martuinov had visited Matusenko, who had almost taken him home with him by force. . . . Martuinov had spread yellow, creamy butter on white household bread, had greedily drunk perfumed, sweetened tea with cream—he had had nothing so tasty for a long time, and he was naïvely surprised;—"How did Matusenko come to have these things?"

And round-faced, attentive Matusenko, had smiled affectionately, blinked his tiny little eyes and respectively, but all the same with a certain tone of house-keeping pride, had entertained Martuinov.

"Take a little honey, Comrade Martuinov. My wife works in the Food Committee, so they give her a very good ration. And do take some milk, from our own cow. . . . A family man can provide himself with everything. I am an economical fellow, and why should I kill myself with hunger? Nothing is said about

that in our Programme. Ha, ha! isn't that so, Comrade Martuinov? Ha, ha! Why are you taking nothing? Grusha, entertain the Chief . . ." jokingly but sternly he said to his wife.

Martuinov caught the eye of Matusenko's wife, a full-breasted, rosy blonde; he saw the gold lights in the blue depths of her pupils and those eyes of hers spoke of the sweetness of love, of the pleasures of the senses that Martuinov had not yet experienced. And showing her white teeth in a smile, Matusenko's wife pushed towards him white butter-cakes, spread with saccharine essence, and said, "Pray, help yourself. . . ."

And Matusenko, in his thin voice went on wheedlingly dropping into Martuinov's ear mawkishly sweet, tidy words, like the butter-cakes spread with saccharine.

Martuinov had looked round Matusenko's room, curtains on the windows, little round tables, a Chinese screen, a divan, a carpet, and remembered the past, so recent, the well-fed

life in the comfortable rooms of his own house, now occupied by a Children's Home, and it had been as if he were regretting all this. . . .

Martuinov knew that he had nowhere to go, and that even in the Politdep he would find no one, that there was nothing there but empty chairs and barefooted women cleaning up, washing the dusty linoleum. Martuinov lay down on his hard bed and stuck his face into the pillow, so as not to see his slovenly room.

And again he remembered his past life—not recent times, after the revolution, when political convictions had taken him and his family by different roads, but his childhood long ago, games of hide and seek in warm rooms, the affection of his dead mother, a Christmas tree, and all the endless stream of that quiet happy life, with its plentiful dinners, suppers and morning teas. . . .

Had there really been such a life? . . .

And from under the pillow he pulled out a blue knitted waist-coat, the only thing left to him from his home, the waist-coat in which,

jingling his skates, he used to run to the rink, —there, on the skating rink, he had made her acquaintance. . . . O bitterness, bitterness! . . .

He put on his coat and went out into the street.

It had grown dark; a few stars were showing, and though the air was keen, yet, for this night, the Spring had stayed in town; the freezing puddles glittered, but streams were bubbling in the dark gutters.

Martuinov walked with quick steps, and thought now of nothing at all, but heard all together, the bubbling of the streamlets, the dripping of water from the roofs, the rustling of the bare twigs, and the whistles of the locomotives in the station. But now all these sounds were covered by another, low, disturbing,—the siren was howling at the Power Station. Martuinov, not understanding was enjoying the lively music of these sounds. The streets were empty, the little houses were quiet, and only when he came to the Red Army

Club, Martuinov met a man with a coat thrown on in a hurry.

The man came right up to Martuinov and looked him straight in the face. They recognised each other—they had often met at the meetings of the Party.

"Sounds like the alarm signal?" said the man.

"Alarm? Why?" Martuinov was surprised, but while he asked, understood already the meaning of that roar, close by and loud, sent out from the Power Station. It was as if some one shouted, threatened, called for help. . . .

"Do you hear?" said the man, "Two breaks. . . . Let's hurry along to the Communist Company."

For Martuinov the quiet comfort of the Spring evening had somewhere disappeared, and everything had become secret, dark and hostile. The hundreds of silent houses were like enemies hiding weapons in the folds of their wide dark cloaks. . . .

"Well, we are on a war-footing today" Martuinov thought aloud, and it occurred to him that at that moment beside this alien, taciturn man, he was going, with quick steps, to suffering, to death which was hanging over the silent little town and at any time was ready to submerge it.

The siren went on booming over the town; it was echoed from the railway station by the powerful chorus of the locomotives and the whistles at the Depot, and the summons of these inhuman voices rolled far beyond the town, over the speechless snow-covered fields, among the quiet villages and hamlets.

The summons was stronger than the fear of suffering and death and from all parts of the town, hundreds of people gathered towards the Communist Company, making their way through the malicious winding lanes. And Martuinov also came into the broad lamp-lit courtyard of the Communist Company. Hurriedly, group after group, the Communists

poured in, and formed quickly into platoons and so squads.

Martuinov also stood in the ranks and dressed by the right in his file.

There was no fear. It had remained outside this bustling courtyard, there, in the empty streets. And Martuinov was ready to kill himself for the ideas that had taken possession of him a few minutes before.

He stood on the left flank, near the gates, and those coming into the yard passed by him, and the lamps flung light on their faces.

Some of the faces were perplexed and intent, others quietly thoughtful, others unrestrainedly nervous, while in others burned the powerful splendid flame of enthusiasm, burned clearly, like a bonfire on a windless Summer night. Women and girls came too; some had not yet chased from their faces coquettishly sly amusement, others, forgetful of themselves earnestly sought some one with their eyes, others laughed, nervously and loudly.

There was one, still quite a boy, red-cheeked and beardless, with a healthy bare neck coming out of his short leather jacket and a careless smile on his face. He called out to a friend in a cheerful voice:

"Well, Mitka, are we going to smash the bandits?" and then disappeared in the dark ranks.

"Do you smoke, Comrade?" some one asked Martuinov, and beside him he saw a quiet simple face almost eaten up with the marks of an ancient small-pox. He recognised him—from the Supply Committee, Stalmakhov.

And Stalmakhov was shaking hands and saying:

"Good day, Comrade Martuinov, I did not recognise you."

And instantly Martuinov covered over with a big grey veil the unquiet ideas, the anxiety, all that was tossing about in his soul. He entered quietly into conversation.

"I am no smoker, Comrade. . . . What is the alarm about? Do you know?"

Stalmakhov had not time to reply before Martuinov's other neighbour, a fat man in a civilian overcoat with a leather belt over it, broke into the talk.

"Probably the bandits have come . . . so I was told . . . bandits with machine-guns. . . ." he hurriedly whispered.

"No, Comrade. Hardly likely to be bandits, and you should not spread unconfirmed rumours."

"I do not think I frightened any one," replied the fat man. "Bandits, what a prodigy!"

"Yes, I know that you are not afraid," said Stalmakhov quietly, "but all the same, why babble? Better say nothing." And he turned away.

People were noisy in the ranks. They were all, like Martuinov, hurriedly covering their doubts, fears and anxious thoughts with big grey veils.

"Dress! Attention!" was called along the ranks.

The ranks became silent, and stiffened, like

fiddle-strings. A blow on them, and with strong enthusiasm, each heart would sing and pour itself into the general symphony of struggle. . . .

Every one listened and looked; three men were walking along the ranks; Karaulov, Klimin, Robeiko.

Klimin's voice rang out clear and sharp:

"Comrades, Communists! There is no need to say much about what you have all read today in the newspapers and yesterday heard at the meeting, namely that before us is the task of bringing seed for the sowing. To bring seed, we need fuel. To get fuel, we need working hands. You must now collect from all the town the hands of the slackers and parasites who are at present doing nothing. Their hands must become working hands. We must make a house to house search, and all who can be taken without loss for the life of the town, and made use of in getting of wood, all these we shall take for several days and,

simultaneously shall be clearing the town of the counter-revolutionary element. Comrade Karaulov is appointed to direct the whole search, he will assign you your districts and give you instructions. Work in unison, be careful and vigilant! . . ."

With abrupt sentences, as if giving orders, Karaulov began to speak. Martuinov did not listen to him. The big courtyard of the Communist Company, the familiar faces of those who had gathered there, now seemed to him workaday and ordinary. After all there was no heroic action before him, neither death nor suffering, but simply a sleepless night.

Martuinov was one of a group of three appointed to visit dwellings, and with him were his stout neighbour and Stalmakhov. Stalmakhov went into the building and was allotted a district to be gone through. When the three of them were walking down the empty street, Martuinov asked Stalmakhov:

"And where is our district? Far?"

"No. Not very. Another four blocks. . . . You know, from the Rozhdestvensky Church to the Post Office."

And Martuinov knew that today he would be in the house in which Nadya Rostovtseva used to live, in which she was still living, the house in which he had spent the best days of his past life.

She had been his love, the love which one can be false to but never forget. Else why had he chosen her in particular from the crowd of merry children with whom he had grown up? For then she had not seemed pretty: a dark face, with high cheekbones, a rather snub nose; only her scarlet lips and those dark wide eyes, made her strangely attractive.

And then she had turned into a bewitching young girl who kept her smiles for him alone, and enchanted him with the wise and tender charm of her face, the severe and sober grace of her movements. . . . And he had known that he had no need of other love or other lips.

He did not like her family, her father, the Colonel bragging of his nobility, the sons who copied him, young elegant officers—and yet he spent his evenings at her house, listened to her unhurried sensible words, and read her his first poems, that he had written for her.

What a short time ago that was, and how irrevocably far it seemed! If there is such a thing as immortality, the soul of the man who died yesterday remembers so his past existence.

The Revolution had come between them. Nadya did not understand it, listened to his burning words, smiling and tearing up a scrap of paper or stuff in her delicate fingers—that was a habit she had—and replied: "All this has happened before, Volodya; every revolution begins with joy and the expectation of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and the event brings so much suffering as to outweigh altogether its diminutive gains."

And each moment the development of the revolution took firmer hold on him, whereas

she became religious, studied the Apocalypse, and expected the end of the world. They became more and more alien and incomprehensible for each other.

At the time of the October Revolution he was an opponent of the Bolsheviks, and was even arrested by them for two weeks. But this arrest did not draw them together but still further drove them apart.

When he came out of prison she met him as if he were a martyr. Whereas for him, all it amounted to was that he "had had some difference of opinion" with the Bolsheviks.

Soon after that he had stopped going to the house. He was pained by the blind hatred with which her whole family regarded the Soviet Government and the revolution.

The civil war separated them for a long time, and then when he, already a Communist, returned to the town with the victorious Red Army and learnt that her brother had been shot as a counter-revolutionary, he could not make up his mind to visit them, and, meeting only in

the street, bowed to her who had grown handsomer though always sad, and she soberly nodded her head in reply, and each meeting left its trace in his soul. . . . The comrades walked in silence, each one immersed in his own thoughts. . . . There was the railing of their garden, from which drooped the boughs of lilac and acacia.

"Well, let's begin with the corner one," Stalmakhov broke the silence.

With the corner one? There it stood, a red brick house, and through the chinks of the closed shutters spirted thin welcoming rays of light, as in that time so long ago. . . .

"No, Comrade Stalmakhov, into that house I will not go. I beg you go in by yourselves," and, catching by the sleeves the coldly wondering Stalmakhov, he whispered to him, "You go in there, the two of you. . . . Acquaintances of mine live here . . . awkward for me . . . I am sorry, of course. . . ."

"All right then. . . . I had forgotten that you are from these parts," Stalmakhov mur-

mured, attentively and humorously looking at Martuinov.

"Come on," said Stalmakhov to the third of them, and they began knocking loudly.

A swarm of thoughts, one after another, rushed through Martuinov's mind, and when the wicket already creaked, and a frightened voice asked, "What is it? What do you want?" Martuinov, breathless from the beating of his heart, with the despair of a man resolved on suicide, went into the big courtyard. Stalmakhov glanced back at him.

They went through the dark passage into the dining room Martuinov knew so well; there, under the bright circle of the lampshade, they were drinking tea. Martuinov knew so well everything in that dining room!

There was Colonel Rostovtsev himself, a little dried up old man, in a worn out military tunic, the places on the shoulders where once had been stitched epaulettes showing green with new cloth. He was serving now in the

Commissariat for War and, with trembling hands, hurried to get his certificate.

There was his wife, a tall, handsome woman with a pale face and eyes like Nadya's, who once upon a time had been so fond of Martuinov. Not raising her head, she went on cleaning the glasses.

And there, in the far corner, was Nadya. . . . It was so long since he had seen her in a simple indoor frock! She was getting up from her chair; she was disturbed and angry —for Martuinov knew every line, every movement of this face that even now was dear to him.

From under the lamp she tried to see those who had come in. . . . She was looking . . . straight into his eyes. She recognised him and turned pale.

He bowed to her. . . . "What for? . . . there was no need to do that" something said in the bottom of his soul, but no, he had already bowed. She leant over her mother and

whispered something in her ear and her mother also looked in his direction.

And who was that by her side, so tall, so good-looking, with a bold look in his clever grey eyes? Stalmakhov was carefully examining his documents. . . . Perhaps her betrothed? . . .

"What, Vladimir Sergeivitch, or do you not know us?" came the proud, slightly lisping voice of her mother. "See, Andriusha, here is Vladimir Sergeivitch," she turned to her husband.

Martuinov felt a sneer in these words. There was a mixture of annoyance and fear on Rostovtsev's face; surprise and amusement on those of the comrades. . . .

But he shook Rostovtsev's dry hot hand, and the passive fingers of his wife, and replied to their questions, what news from his relations, what news from Siberia, and he was holding out his hand to Nadya, raising his eyes to hers, meeting her burning glance. . . . A fugitive smile ran across her face, quickly replaced by

a grimace of tears, and she went swiftly out of the room.

Martuinov heard at his ear the insistent voice of Stalmakhov. "Get done quickly . . . we are already going." And, leaving the house Martuinov confusedly explained that these were old acquaintances of his. . . . "A very reactionary family. . . ."

"Yes, I know," broke in Stalmakhov. "Last Spring a son of theirs was shot, Lieutenant Rostovtsev. A suspicious crowd. You saw just now some sort of Military Specialist was sitting with them. Repin his name. But his papers were all in order . . . they had been countersigned by the Commandant of the town. And you had relations who ran off with Kolchak?"

Martuinov explained with discomfort. For he was of bourgeois family. His father was a capitalist, the owner of the local leather factories. His family was now in Kharbin, but he, of course, had broken all connection with them.

Stalmakhov said nothing and smoked. They went into the next house, and were met again with frightened questions, "What do you want?" And, mechanically examining greasy documents, Martuinov thought how now all was finished with Nadya, but that he had stood the test and was worthy to be a Communist. But why then should Stalmakhov be scornful of him.

And in the Rostovtsev's house there was peace again, and all were sitting once more round the tea-table—all but Nadya—when Repin, handing an empty glass to the mistress of the house, asked:

"That Communist who was here—do you know him?"

"Yes," she replied. "He is of good family, passed through the Gymnasium, and often used to visit us formerly, but now, of course. . . ."

"A self-opinionated, bumptious fellow he always was," sharply replied Rostovtsev. "And now he has taken up with that filth.

And to have the insolence to come to our house! For formerly he was not indifferent to Nadezhda . . . that's why she ran off. Nadezhda," he shouted loudly, "come here."

"Andriusha," said his wife reproachfully, "leave her alone."

Before she slept Nadya prayed for Volodya more fervently than ever—not for that Volodya who many years ago had kissed her lips on the skating rink, whose letters were even now lying in her jewel-box, not for the handsome lad with blue eyes, healthy red cheeks and a merry loud laugh, but for the present-day Volodya, somehow new, thinner, big-eyed, such as she had seen him the last time, when they had met one day in Winter at the entrance of one of the Soviet Institutions, when she had noticed that his boots were falling to pieces and the soles tied to the uppers with bits of new thread.

She prayed, remembered and wept. She wept because she loved him and did not understand that strange force that bewitched him and

took him away from her. She wept because she wanted his love, wanted a real, young, joyful existence, but her eyes were bound and she could not enter the bright road by which he had gone away, and she prayed for the soul of the sinful Volodya, and prayed also, desperately, that his life might be spared.

In the sleeping town the merry work of several hundreds of Communists went on. Pickets stood in the middle of the empty streets; the noise of horses' feet sounded through the town, the directors of the search riding round the districts; everywhere comrades, three together were disappearing into the houses for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, and then, as a result, were bringing out of the houses frightened men, and handing them over to the pickets, who convoyed them to the central staff of the searchers, where Gornuikh, who had now not slept for three days and nights, registered and questioned them, establishing their identity.

The young, cheerful sun was rising when

Martuinov wearily walked home to his lodging. His head ached and it seemed to him that he had grown somehow dirty from plunging into other peoples' dwellings, and a kaleidoscope of the rooms he had visited during the night kept flashing in his eyes.

Close by his lodging he saw a poster: a Red Army soldier in a red shirt defending a mouzhik in bast shoes. The mouzhik was sowing an impossible green field, and Martuinov caught himself in a motion of disgust at the primitive picture, the coarse colours and vulgar drawing.

IV

Of the non-party employees in the Politdep, only Lisa Gratcheva the Red Army schoolmistress, went to the Saturdaying. Afraid of being late, she ran through the streets, regardless of the puddles, and was delighted when, coming round a corner, she saw the dark noisy crowd of comrades.

They noticed her coming at once. She was not tall; thin, always melancholy and silent. When sometimes her freckled face was lit up by a smile, like a sunbeam running over the grass, it was for a moment only, and then she would quietly and timorously look about her. She taught arithmetic to the Red Army soldiers, and her small ringing voice, that once enriched the choir of the Gymnasium in the distant city where she had studied, now sounded every day from behind the big looking-glass windows of

a shop on the main street. That was where her school was.

She was afraid of everything on earth. Her parents had died long ago and she had grown up among strangers, where they reproached her with every crumb of bread. Fear became a habit for her; it caught her by the throat when she was talking to people, and every evening forced her to her knees to pray to the unknown, also terrible but all-seeing, all-forgiving and kind.

At first she had been afraid of the Red Army men also, blushed before them at lessons, and always expected some prank or other on their part. Her voice trembled and broke; she was afraid to question her pupils, and used to long with anguish for the end of the lesson.

But one day when she was carrying home her rations, with hands freezing in the February wind, two tall Red Army men came up to her —her pupils. As usual, she was terrified and blushed, but one of them, a blue-eyed giant,

politely offered to help her, and, without waiting for permission, lightly tossed the bag over his shoulder.

From that time she had grown attached to her pupils, watched carefully over each one of them, and came to love her work, and tried to make her teaching simpler and easier for them.

She began to come to the gatherings of the Red Army units, and listened carefully to reports and speeches, though there was much that she did not understand.

Formerly she had been afraid of the Revolution, as she was afraid of everything that was loud and strong and transfused everything with the bright colours of love and hate, but now, loving and understanding her Red Army pupils, she came through this love to the understanding of the Revolution. She understood in her own way. She made her own Revolution, her own Communism, and Christ, the son of the carpenter of Nazareth, to Whom formerly she had prayed as to the King of Heaven, took for

her a new significance;—he came down to earth and became the protector of all revolutionaries, of all who were striving for the happiness of humanity.

She was now full of reverent respect for the Communists, and began to be more often in their company, though now and then the things they did puzzled her exceedingly.

She was most of all disconcerted by the Commander of the battalion of the Tcheka, where she worked in the school. "How can they keep such people in the Party," she thought, looking at his elegant boots, his red riding-breeches, and frequently hearing him using bad language.

Lisa lived in Senator's house, where she occupied a long narrow room shaped like a match-box. There was no furniture in the room, only a bed—planks covered with a counter-pane—oh yes, and there was also a *tuya*, a strange plant, like a fir-tree of capricious form. Madam Senator had tried to take it away, but the plant would not go through the door and

therefore was graciously left for Lisa. The *tuya* was withering from the frost, for in Winter it was very cold in the room, and when Lisa woke in the mornings she never knew what time it was; the light came dimly, dimly, through the single frost-covered window-pane.

As a rule Lisa did not take tea in the mornings. But today, before going to the Saturdaying, she wanted to drink something hot. In the kitchen the samovar had been set going, its chimney was murmuring, and butter was hissing on the saucepan. Madam Senator was making potato-cakes, and the smells from the kitchen came into Lisa's room.

She must ask for a little water, just a teapotful, but asking was a terror for her. . . .

For Mr. and Madam Senator could openly express all their hatred for the incomprehensible force, for the red flag, the posters, the strange names of the institutions, all the malice that they had to hide from the Communists, who were mercilessly strict, the malice that had to be hidden under the polite words, only to

Lisa, defenceless and piteous, who by her very poverty inspired them with scorn.

"Always praying to God, too. . . . Teaching that Red Army filth, that canaille. . . . What does she teach them? Robbery?"

"And she still prays . . ." echoed Madam Senator. "Clear enough, she is living with a Commissar. . . ."

They were talking so in the kitchen when Lisa, timorously opening the door, asked: "May I have a little boiling water?" Her teapot was shaking in her hands.

"We are bourgeois, and you are asking leave from bourgeois! Why ask? Steal, steal!" Madam Senator screamed at her in answer, and Raphael Antonovitch repeated in unison, "Steal it, of course, since you have taken up with those robbers. . . ."

Lisa almost wept at the insult, and ran hurriedly down the staircase, to get as soon as possible into the open air.

Lisa had scarcely taken her place in the ranks when the group from the Politdep moved off;

they marched irregularly, laughing and talking, came out on the main street, and added their scarlet flag with its party slogan to the chain of other flags. There were the workmen from the Depot carrying their flag that they had preserved since 1917, "Peace to the cottage and war to the palace." There were the printers, with their grey faces and bent backs, and there the "Alliance of Youth" a small group of noisy lads and lasses under a huge flag on which was drawn a workman striking a blow on an anvil with a big unreal hammer.

They marched and sang, not in unison, revolutionary songs. In one place they were irregularly singing the "Internationale" while not far off the workwomen from the Communal Refectory were screaming the "Varshavyanka."

The sun was shaded with clouds when the group from the Politdep together with the other groups of the town district came to the Public Garden. Saws and axes gleamed dimly in peoples' hands; the Public Garden

was like transparent lace-work: rooks were calling from the tall bare trees.

This disorderly, leafless mass of trees, most beautiful in its variety, was to be turned into regular stacks of wood.

Once upon a time in the Town Garden, over there, in the further shady alleys, Martuinov had walked with Nadya in the scented July evenings; with his eyes he found the tree in the bark of which, while still a schoolboy in the sixth form, he had cut her initials with a knife. Now he was to cut down that tree and turn it into firewood. And again there was a bitter joy in his heart.

The saws clanged and the trees trembled. When they cut them down, the trees fell heavily, breaking their own and their neighbours' boughs. They then sawed up their bodies and carelessly and roughly split up the round logs. The stumps were covered with scented tears; in death the trees gave out their perfumes and the sharp smell of the poplar mingled with the fresh sweet aroma of birch sap.

V

"Have a smoke!" Stalmakhov's loud voice rang out. "We have earned a rest. Its past midday."

One team of three after another stopped working, and the garden was full of laughter and jokes.

Martuinov looked about him . . . the unbroken, translucent curtain of the Spring garden was no more. The trees that had survived stood orphaned and solitary. The sky had only been visible through chinks among their interlacing branches and now great windows had been opened to it, through which the sun shone joyfully.

Martuinov looked at the sun, blinked and heard how the cocks where crowing somewhere in the black mass of yards and houses, and how the waves of their calling faintly splashed

and echoed somewhere at the other end of the town.

And, looking round the garden, printing on his mind the rows of whitening, fresh-cut stumps, and the groups of comrades, Martuinov felt again as in the morning that he was taking part in a tremendous task and struggle, and found that he too was part of the rhythm of a great symphony.

Stalmakhov, with a seven-foot staff in his hand [a sazhin, the Russian measure, is seven feet], which he had made himself from a slim young birch-tree, walked from stack to stack and made notes of the work done on a bit of paper.

"Stalmakhov, come over here, I think we have cut a cubic sazhin, but Martuinov says not."

Simkova dragged Stalmakhov by the coat-sleeve towards a group of women-workers who were piling up a narrowish, long stack.

Simkova was red from working, and from under her kerchief, which had slipped on one

side, curly locks of hair fell on her face. It was hard to recognise in her reserved and strict Simkova, the member of the Party Committee, the director of Culteduc [abbreviation for Culture and Education].

"There's not a cubic sazhin," said Stalmakhov, measuring. "Two and a half sazhins . . . well done all the same. Nine cubes set up already, taking all together," said he sitting down on a stump and taking out a little box of Mahorka tobacco and some thin cigarette paper.

"Have a smoke, Simkova," he offered the tobacco to her, "and tell us what fine things you saw in Moscow."

"Again. . . ." Simkova laughed. "I have already told all about it five times today. And on Saturday I shall be making a report to the Party meeting."

"Oh well, but tell us all the same . . . your impressions."

"Impressions? . . ." her fingers rolled the cigarette paper and carefully poured the

Mahorka into it; she delicately licked the paper and made a cigarette. Her forehead wrinkled. "A bad impression; I like things better here. I have the impression that the Moscow Communists, and especially the average ones, not leaders, nor yet the mass, are not conscious of, do not feel, this whole huge peasant Russia which is now surging about us and helping the ruin. Of course Lenin understands, and understands perhaps better than we do, and, besides him, a small group understand, but the majority of responsible workers have grown terribly indifferent in attitude. . . . Their attitude towards work, even towards party work, is official, defined by hours. Freed from worry about food and heating, and that means a lot, they not consciously—no, unconsciously—have the feeling that with us, in Russia, things are not so bad.

"Take for example the Moscow newspapers and reviews," she grew animated. "In them everything is so fine and grand. . . . Proletariat and Communist Revolution. . . .

And have we got much Communism just now, or proletariat? Fine clubs set up with rich furniture and red flags. Only, these magnificent clubs are not heated, scarcely any one goes into them, and only small groups do any work.

"No. I like things better here; for we, in the provincial towns, live as it were on the front. The front of the class struggle lies with us here. . . ."

And she looked thoughtfully towards the distant purple fields, visible through the glades of the garden.

"Do you mean by that that there is no need for Moscow?" Stalmakhov interrupted with curiosity.

"No. I know we need Moscow. It's necessary as a General Staff, as a directive centre. And a tremendous work is being done there. Moscow is the heart, the chief cistern of the state mechanism, bad as it may be. . . . All the same . . . I'm happier here."

They listened to her attentively. Lisa also did not miss a single word, though there was

much that she did not understand. Why, here, in this peaceful, quiet town, was it as if on the front? A front against the peasants? But surely the Bolsheviks were on the side of the people?

Matusenko, it appeared, was entirely wrapped up in attention, and when Lisa accidentally knocked over a log, he angrily frowned at her.

He held his hand to his ear. The star on his coat, the buttons, all were glittering. Matusenko did not know what was the good of Saturdaying, or why these clever educated people, like Simkova and Martuinov, had to do rough work, or why he, Matusenko, had to do it, but none the less he worked honestly all the time, and had arrived punctually at nine o'clock, just as, formerly, he had never been late in the days when he used to go to church service, stand where his Chief could see him, and cross himself, elegantly crooking his fingers, though he had not liked kneeling, because it was bad for his trousers.

"Look, there's Klimin coming, and Ziman too," said Stalmakhov.

Klimin approached them, looking for some one with his eyes, and saw Stalmakhov and the others. "Well, district-organizer, how are things with you?" he called from some way off, and came nearer and nearer himself. . . . Stalmakhov presented arms with his measuring rod: "Nine cubes we've stacked, your honour." [He was parodying the form of address of a soldier to an officer under the Old Régime.] "And what about the other districts?" Klimin smiled and, as always, when he smiled, his face grew several years younger.

"The Red Army men in the Monastery Garden stacked thirty-four cubes today. Good lads! I'm afraid I forgot to praise them but the captive bourgeoisie is working with them too," he laughed. "Yes, and the Saturdaying will help a lot. If things go on like this, in three days we shall be sending off the first lots. . . ."

As he ended the sentence his voice shook.

He was happy, and could hardly believe in the nearness of victory.

"Even the cold-blooded Ziman is in high spirits today," cried Simkova, laughing.

Ziman stood on a stump, wiped his glasses, and, in his squeaky voice, announced to some of the comrades that the economic situation of the district was going to be splendid. . . .

"Not at once; in twenty years, of course," he added. "For we have a seam of peat. And now when I ask for a few score cubes of wood, and that without knowing whether the wood will burn or not, the wood is so damp. . . . Yes, Klimin, damp . . . at that very moment before my eyes glistens the thought that here, under the ground, is dozing such a quantity of calorific energy. . . . Only five versts from the town. . . . Survey already made. . . . If only we get a good harvest this year, we shall begin the peat-cutting. Excavators we have; I got hold of them at Nizhni-Elansk. We will mend them. . . ." He turned with a mysterious,

cunning look, in the direction of Lisa Gratcheva, though his eyes, blind without their glasses, did not see her, but only the white patch of her face and the blue of her dress.

Simkova touched Klimin's sleeve.

"Come and see me today," she said, and added hurriedly, "after work of course, in the evening."

He shook her hand.

The Saturdaying finished. Again they formed in ranks, again marched through the streets and sang. Lisa Gratcheva's boots were wet through, but all the same she marched in the ranks and sang with them, "Boldly, Comrades, keeping time." . . . Simkova was walking beside her. Lisa had known Simkova before, as the director of the Culteduc, as the "Chief"; on two occasions she had gone to her in the office, on business, timorously, and, under the big portrait of Trotsky, at the wide writing table, Simkova had seemed to her very unapproachable and severe.

And now Lisa saw beside her a young girl with flaxen curly hair escaping from under her kerchief, and fresh, rosy cheeks. Simkova liked Lisa too, and knew her for one who worked whole-heartedly. Besides Lisa was the only one of the non-party employees of the Politdep who had come to the Saturdaying.

They took each other's hands. Lisa talked of the school, her pupils and her troubles. . . .

Then Lisa went through the square to the Senators' house; from a long way off one could see the big two-storied building, with the soviet signboard amid the grey mass of little houses. From far away she saw some one come out of the gate in a Red Army helmet with a big Red Army star, and instantly recognised Repin.

She had become acquainted with him on the first day of his appearance at Senator's house. Senator was abusing the Soviet Government in Lisa's presence, and Lisa was standing red and troubled, ready to weep and not knowing what

to reply—when suddenly the door opened and Repin appeared together with the red-haired man.

Senator became solicitous:

"Your room, Comrade Repin, is ready," he said, obligingly; "would you care to go to it at once?"

But Repin decided to join in the conversation, the last words of which he had heard.

"The Soviet Government wishes well to all the people," shouted Senator. "But am I, if you please, not one of the people? Is he not one of the people?" And Senator pointed with his finger at the red-haired man, who roared in approval.

"What good have they done to us? Fleeced us, that's all. . . ."

And Repin, in reply, had talked for a long time of how among the Communists were many shirkers, of how the Communists often made mistakes, but that after all they were "working for an ideal. . . ." And he looked at

Lisa, as if to say with his eyes, "You see, you and I are of the same opinion!"

In general he was so handsome and kindly, and now he warmly shook Lisa by the hand, and his thick strong voice was touched with caressing intonations.

"Good day, Comrade Gratcheva. . . . I was going to ask you, how do I get to the Town Garden? . . ."

"The Town Garden? I have just come from it. There was a Saturdaying there . . . for getting wood. We cut down almost the whole garden."

"But are you of the Party?"

"No. But non-party people can go to the Saturdayings. And I think one ought to help the Communists. Isn't it so?"

"Of course. Of course I would have gone too, if I had known of the Saturdaying before. Well, and did you do much?"

"Yes. A lot. I forget how many cubes, but we cut down nearly all the garden. . . .

Even the most responsible workers were working there, and I worked together with Comrade Martuinov. And Klimin was there, the President of the Tcheka."

She told Repin exactly how to get to the Town Garden.

VI

A FROSTY wind had been blowing since the morning, but the sky had remained blue and the colours of everything were sharp and bright. Now, high up, blue-white clouds were floating and the wind with unseen hands carried them across the sky till they covered the sun, when everything became gloomy and dull. Stalmakhov walked hurriedly from his office through the big square where the market was spread out.

Suddenly his attention was caught by a young fellow shrinking with cold, in a tattered jacket. Stalmakhov noticed the strong hands, dark with dirt and cold, the sack on his shoulders . . . probably a workman from the Depot who had stolen some tools from hunger and was exchanging them for bread.

But that forehead, that shaggy head of hair

protruding from under his cap, seemed to Stalmakhov strangely familiar, and an irresistible impulse made him hurry after the fellow, lay his hand on his shoulder, and ask, "Comrade, what have you got for sale?" And the other turned, winked, looked round, and said in a dull, gloomy voice:

"Good day, Comrade Stalmakhov."

"Gornuikh! You? What are you doing here?" But Gornuikh already had Stalmakhov by the sleeve, and was pulling him out of the crowd. . . ."

"Yes. Yes. I. . . . But you, don't you shout so loud. . . . Come along quickly."

They went to the wooden boarded-up booths, the remains of the old bazaar—nowadays used as a latrine by the market-folk. They came there, and, looking round, Gornuikh said in his deep bass voice:

"And what are you doing here, eh? Walking about? Watching? Just so. There is work for us all here. It's a pity that you called attention to me. Today I had worked most

carefully over my costume and face. In Winter, no one would have known. True, we met today. . . . Find Klimin at once and tell him. . . ."

Gornuikh looked round. He looked with his eyes only, not turning his head.

"Tell him that I waited for him two hours today in the Commission. And don't you look for him in the Commission. He does not go there in the evenings. Probably in the Party Committee. He got mixed up in this business of getting wood, and chucked his work in the Tcheka. Although, to tell the truth, there is nothing to be done there without him. He is a good organiser and more energetic than any of them. All the same it's a pity that nowadays he is so seldom in the Tcheka. Well, find him. He is either in the Executive Committee, or in the Party Committee, or with Karaulov in the Commissariat for War. Look for him all through the town."

"But what are you so excited about?" Stalmakhov interrupted him; "he is sure to be in

the Commission tomorrow. You will see him there, and can tell him yourself everything you want to."

Gornuikh gripped Stalmakhov firmly by the arm. In his made-up face there was an unaccustomed anxiety.

"Listen to me, Stalmakhov, and do as I tell you. . . . I fear tomorrow will be too late. . . . There is to be a revolt today. . . . Almost for certain."

"Revolt?" said Stalmakhov amazedly. "But what grounds have you got for thinking that?"

"Grounds for thinking it? There are and there aren't. See what a lot of carts from N—— Government on the market. I can always tell an N—— peasant from one of our own. I think they have got weapons hidden in them. But how am I to find them? A search would have to be made and the whole market surrounded, and now it's already late. Yes, and you can tell by the general feeling. Here they are always longing to see the end of us. . . . But today the market-women are say-

ing with such confidence that today, precisely, not tomorrow, will be the end of the servants of Anti-Christ . . . that's us, of course." Stalmakhov laughed. Gornuikh continued:

"You think it funny that Gornuikh should be listening to the babbling of women. But I know that sometimes it's well enough for a Tchekist to pay attention to women's babble. You can always tell if, under the babble, there is the seed of a plot, or if it is simply hostile feeling towards us. . . . In general the mouzhiks need understanding. They do not see far, but what is before their eyes they examine and turn to account better than you or I. Well then, find Klimin, tell him, stir him up, and at least let him take some precautions. The rest of our Tchekists are a useless crowd. Today I quarrelled with the whole lot of them. I tell them that we must be on our guard, and they make a joke of it. It's true, I've got no sort of clues. If there was anything to get hold of, I'd have it already. There's nothing; but I feel it in everything, in

the last bulletins, in the answers of prisoners, in trivialities that you can't call proofs, but are enough to make me anxious. They've just killed one Tchekist, two hundred versts from here, and it seems to me that all this taken together speaks only of one thing, and that is of revolt in the near future. . . ."

"Killed? What was his name?" Stalmakhov asked in agitation. "Not Surikov?"

"Surikov. . . . He probably got nervous, made a mess of the business and did for himself. A good fellow, but a bad Tchekist. But did you know him?"

"We lived together. . . . Tell me more about his death. . . . Perhaps its only rumour."

"No. Not rumour. Information from agents. . . . They buried him alive in the ground. . . . But that is beside the point. You go and find Klimin, without fail, do you hear? It's too late to declare a state of war, but at least let them get the Communist Company under arms. . . . Or they will cut the

whole lot to pieces like chickens. Well, off with you."

He shook Stalmakhov's hand firmly.

"Then it's true about Surikov?"

"Of course, true! There's nothing to be done; our work is like that, one must be ready for anything, and probably it was his own fault. . . ." And Gornuikh, bent and ragged, with a sack on his back, went off and disappeared in the crowd.

Stalmakhov walked home by the uneven, half-frozen road. His mind was empty, and thoughts ran through it like mice through a cold bright room.

Killed him. . . . And in a moment he would be home, and on the threshold of the house-door, the orphaned mother would ask for news of him, of Sergei. And hard though it would be he would have to lie to her. He would have to, for in his pocket lay a note from Serezha [affectionate diminutive of Sergei] Surikov, written at the last station before he had gone off there into the blue steppe:

Dear Stalmakhov, if I am killed, tell Mother that I have gone off for some years on a distant mission. To Germany or America. That will be my last request. In memory of our friendship, take my photograph. It is fastened to my old certificate, which is lying on the upper shelf of the what-not.

Live and work well.

SERGEI SURIKOV

P. S. In case of my death give the letter enclosed with this to the President of the Tcheka, Comrade Klimin.

And when in answer to his emphatic knock the door opened, Stalmakhov saw her, just as he had expected to see her, a little thin old woman with a wrinkled face, and her kind blue eyes, over her spectacles in their tarnished copper frames, looked enquiringly up at him.

And he heard the question:

"Nothing has happened to Serezha? You do not know if there is a letter from him?"

Stalmakhov thought how Sergei, her beloved Serezha, the thread of silver light that held her joyless old age to joyful life, had died a terrible lonely death in the endless

steppes away there to the south-east. Unaccustomed pity stirred his heart.

"I know nothing fresh, Anna Petrovna," he replied, not looking her in the eyes. She stood on one side and let him go past her, and he went into his room where two beds stood, his and Serezha's, Serezha who had been killed in the far blue steppes.

"Do you not need a samovar, Andre Vasilievitch?" she asked, following him into the room. She sighed and sat down on a chair by the door.

Serezha Surikov . . . tall and well-made, a little bent, chestnut hair touched with gold, a face, at first sight the most ordinary face of a young Red Army soldier, a handsome lad from the country, but lit from within by some sort of fire that beautified every line of the simple face, like a candle turning an unpretentious paper lantern into a most marvellous star. A broad nose, blue eyes, soft, humorous mouth, gold hair on his cheeks, upper lip and chin. . . .

Quiet, taciturn, as if he were keeping some

secret, he used to come home after a long day's work in the Tcheka. His movements were unhurried, like his sensible rarely spoken words. His mother, with affectionate glance, watched every movement of her Serezha, listened to his every word, and gave what was left over of her affection to Stalmakhov who was already grown-up, hardened, and forgetful of mother-love, remembering it as something far, far away.

Stalmakhov was sorry for her, found it hard to lie to her, and at the same time was vexed that he had not lied more and told her that Serezha had gone to Germany.

Not long before, a woman who had loved him dearly, had given Stalmakhov a little vase as a keep-sake. On it was an old-fashioned picture of some sort of amorous fancy. . . . Doves spread cloudy-blue wings over their young. . . . Plump naked cupids were scattered about, and in the middle, on a cloud, sat a shepherd and a shepherdess. The shepherd was playing on a lute, probably playing

well, because an affectionately thoughtful smile lingered on her face; a little white lamb was nibbling the flowers of a bouquet she had on her knees. The neck of the vase was made in the shape of a flower, and on the blue were scattered stars, gold and silver ones, and some of powdered glass that glittered with little fires. . . . He had taken the vase in awkward hands.

"I don't know where I'm to put this pot," he had said to himself, looking round the room, and had put the vase on the top shelf of the what-not. And every morning, on waking, he had raised his eyes to the what-not, and seeing the vase, had remembered her with humorous affection, that incomprehensible woman, alien in ideas and appearance, beautiful, smelling of rare scents, and so dearly loving him, an uneducated workman, who did not know how to speak words of love, and had a face eaten over by small-pox.

She was an actress, and had soon left the town. He too had gone off on food-work into the country. And when, after long absence,

he came back to his room and sought the vase with his eyes, he had seen it standing on the table, covered with dirty ink-spots, with a piece broken out of its neck. It had turned out that Serezha Surikov, not suspecting that for Stalmakhov the vase was a love-token, had used it as an ink-pot. Stalmakhov had been much displeased, but, not saying a word to Serezha, had poured the ink out of it, and had set it on the far side of the what-not, so as not to see it, darkened and dirty, with a thin crack spoiling the tender smile of the shepherdess.

And always now, when people gave him something as a souvenir, a photograph or some sort of useless thing, he remembered the vase and took the gift unwillingly. Even the letters he got from his comrades somehow or other got lost.

Suddenly hatred awoke in him. Swine! Swine! That curly-headed boy, so clever, so conscientious, so boundlessly devoted to the Party, buried alive in the ground!

Revenge? But there was no one on whom

to avenge him. Rage boiled up in him and he clenched his fists. Then he remembered what Gornuikh had asked him, and the energy of his hate found an outlet. Yes, he would find Klimin and urge him to be on his guard. And tomorrow he would ask the Party Committee to give him a detachment of troops and then he would go and smash up the bandits. But now, at all costs, he must find Klimin. With this idea he went out of his lodging.

Klimin, at the doors of the Party Committee, ran right into Stalmakhov and was amazed at the excitement and bitterness playing on that face, that was usually so calm.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Klimin, greeting him.

Stalmakhov told him of his meeting with Gornuikh and reported all his fears. They walked quietly along the street empty but for children, dogs and hens that bustled away under the gates.

"I tell you plainly, Stalmakhov, I do not know what Gornuikh wants me to do," said

Klimin irritably. "All the preventive measures that depend on me have been taken, the guard strengthened at the Communist Company. . . . Karaulov has given the battalion to understand that they must be on the watch. . . . And then, too, Gornuikh has no sort of data. And in any case I am not going to hold up important economic work on account of the premonitions of a single Tchekist. There is enough to do without that, what with thinking of everything and foreseeing each trivial detail. One has to do everybody's work, to such an extent are our comrades incapable. Everything is done slowly, people dawdle, and that when the situation is such that we ought to value and make use of every minute. Working with Ziman is torture; you simply can't stir him up. And now Gornuikh with his fears and suspicions. . . . I am sick of things in general today, Stalmakhov. . . . I sent a Tchekist into the steppe on an important mission, and the bandits have killed him and now I cannot forgive myself for sending

him at all. He was not fit for such work, too nervous altogether, an intellectual. . . ."

"I knew him. He was my comrade. We shared a lodging. His mother is left. . . ." Stalmakhov's voice sounded duller and duller. "He sent me a note from the station, and asked me, in case of his death, to give you this letter. Here it is."

A few quiet minutes passed while Klimin hurriedly ran his eyes over the letter, finished it and carefully folded it.

"Look here, Klimin . . . tomorrow I'm going to ask the Party Committee to send me out against the bandits. And that filth that killed him. . . . I'll take the skin off them. And now, I beg you. . . . Read me his letter. Every word of Sergei's is dear to me. I'll listen and see him as you read."

"I'll read it," replied Klimin. They sat down on a low bench.

VII

"Dear Comrade Klimin,

"I am now at the station of N——sk. Glebov has gone off for a cart, it's four hours already since he went. It's a little station, and I am entirely alone. I've looked over the old, even pre-war, advertisements and notices which do not harmonise with life today, admired a marvellous poster on the subject of the improvement of transport, and then made my way into the room of the Railway Tcheka, and, at the sight of pen and ink, the desire came to me to tell you openly the ideas which wander now in my head and the experiences which are troubling my soul. Why you, Comrade Klimin, you will probably understand. Remember how in the Politdep of the N—— Division, you, an old member of the Party, Divisional Chief, tolerantly talked for hours with me when I was a non-party, self-confident lad, whose head was crammed with every sort of intellectual absurdity. You listened patiently to my stupid opinions, neatly cut the ground from under them, and then pushed me towards Marxism, and patiently told

me the alphabet of socialism and the class-struggle. I joined the Party later, in the regiment, but actually it was your lessons that made me a Communist. And when you went to the Tcheka, as soon as the front was liquidated I went to you to work. And under your leadership I became a true Communist and revolutionary. You, for me, were the ideal of a Communist. It's for that reason I am writing not to my mother or to other comrades who know and care for me, but to you in particular, my Chief, into whose room in working hours I must not go without sending my name in first.

"You will get this letter only in case I am killed. And I have very little doubt that they will kill me. And that is a good thing, because I have nothing more to do in life, I am not a man but only the shell of a man, and my soul is entirely empty. So at least let me die with advantage for Communism.

"But, so that you shall understand me, I will tell you everything in order.

"You remember how last year, after the discovery of a plot throughout the whole district, we drove out to shoot five White Guards.

"It was a frosty Winter's night. With a witches' moon with a ring round it. Our lorry went fast over the glittering high-road which had been worn smooth

by the sledges. Lezhavin was with us. He was nervous, as it was the first time he had been at an execution, and he behaved with unnatural cheerfulness and talked now with you, now with me. You, as always, gave him businesslike, succinct replies, but in your replies there was an intonation scarcely to be felt, 'Boy, don't pretend; you are not yourself.' I replied to him in single words. I did not want to talk. I was too tired after the day, and was resting in the silence of the blue slightly frosty night. . . . Now and then I looked into the body of the lorry, and saw 'them,' saw the watchful faces of the lads (soldiers), remembered whither we were going. It became unpleasant. But after all it was not the first shooting in which I had taken part.

"We drove to the Monastery Wood, that crowd of enchanted trees, covered with hoarfrost, like the dreams of a freezing man before death. In some places the trees were thinner, and we could see mysterious blue glades.

"We walked by a narrow track to one of these glades. There was an old abandoned quarry there, full of snow in winter-time, but seeming, none the less, a deep, dark blue pit.

"On the way there all were silent.

"They behaved well and awaited death quietly. I

somehow did not ask myself the question, of what they were thinking for the last time, these people who no longer seemed to have any part in anything. I had already accepted everything in advance, when I asked you to let me come and work with you in the Tcheka. I knew beforehand all that would be; revolting moments when one was aiming into a defenceless bunch of people. But all that would be over so quickly, and after the resounding volley, that makes the birch-trees near by shed their snowy dust, five human bodies would fall deep, deep, into the darkness of the quarry, and we should drive home again and listen once more to the magical Winter silence.

"But something happened that I had not expected. . . . You said to them in a low voice:

" 'Undress, citizens!'

"They looked at each other. One took off his short fur coat. The others followed his example.

" 'No. Undress altogether,' you said, and added, as if for our information, 'We shall shoot them naked.'

"The lads were grimly silent, and in their silence one felt that they agreed with you, and understood you, and were ready to shoot naked people. It was very quiet; only, far off, we could hear the loud noise of the motor of our lorry.

"Then they began to protest. You remember their protests? One of them said that one ought to make a man's death easy for him; and another that this was mockery, and the old Black Hundred schoolmaster tall, with sloping shoulders and a long grey beard, suddenly began crying, bitterly, like a child, and through his tears he said that it was 'not right' to do so, and that he had influenza. I knew that he had served the Secret Police, had betrayed his pupils, and been given a decoration for doing so, I knew how profound was his hatred for us, and all the same my own body began to shake with slight tremors, just as if I were being made to undress. . . . And then too the quavering voice of Lezhavin said to you:

" 'Comrade Klimin, there's no need to do that. There's no need to tease them. What for?' And there were tears in his voice.

"One of the lads cursed him angrily. You said:

" 'But what's the point of their clothes being destroyed? In their linen and clothes some one may be dressed who is useful to the Republic. In a minute they will not need the clothes,' and you added in a low whisper, turning to Lezhavin:

" 'Don't disorganise things. Go to the motor and wait for us.'

"Then they understood that there was no way out.

They sat down on tree-stumps, pulled off their boots and trousers, got out of their underclothes. The bodies of those who were in the transparent shadow of the trees seemed greenish yellow, like bodies seen through the transparent water of a lake. The moonlight made the bodies of the others bluish white. . . . Ah, how silent, how incomprehensible it all was, as if in a terrible, never to be repeated dream, in some sort of frozen nightmare.

"I had often walked in that place in the summer. I knew well the old pine with the divided trunk by which we were standing. I knew each branch of it. I recognised the big axe-cuts on the lower part of the trunk.

"I had loved that pine-tree, but it seemed tc me strangely alien and hostile. A mother is alien and hostile like that in those terrible moments when you see her in a nightmare, aloof, pitiless, quietly indifferent to you, to your outstretched hands, to your prayers for help. The sight of those people undressing in the forest brought suddenly before my eyes a picture of people bathing on the bank of a lake on a hot sunny day. It was a strange association, but I felt that my ideas were getting confused, and it was well that the resounding volley broke the spell at a blow.

"You remember me before that shooting? I took part with enthusiasm in all the work of the Tcheka, and was proud of taking part in it. I lightheartedly signed my conclusions on the protocols of evidence and without the slightest tremor myself carried out death sentences. And all that because I knew for certain, yes and I know it still, that this was a bloody road, but the only road out of the horror that ruled over the lives of people in this world. I was sorry for people, and suffered from their sufferings, but knew that only through the death of the enemies of the Revolution was possible the road to Communism. Wherefore I was so merciless. I had reembodied my great pity as a great hatred. And I think that that is what every Communist does.

"The time will come, and I hope it will come soon, when this great human pity will make the life of man on earth most beautiful. Then the suffering of one near to him will wound a man painfully. People will treat with extreme care another's organism, that beautiful human body, built like yours or mine, which like them suffers and is hurt. It will be so. But, just now, that pitifulness must be turned into hate. And, up to that shooting, I was able to do that.

"But now, it is just as if the blood of those naked White Guards had splashed my soul. They stick in my memory, undressing in the light of the moon, their trembling naked bodies, the rattle of the shots, and their groans. . . . Those terrible groans that sounded from the quarry! The groans of a body beside itself, dying! You may call this softness but, you know, when they took their clothes off, I suddenly very, very clearly imagined that it was I who was undressing, that it was my body that the frost was laying hold of, that the bullets were threading through my own bones and muscles, that it was I who was groaning with terrible rending groans.

"I was no longer able to write death sentences. . . . You cross-examine, you look yourself into those living eyes, see those hands, follow the play of wrinkles over the face, never for a moment forget that you are enemies, but all the same you think, surely not my hand will send this organism to death?

"The boundary of hatred, for me, is crossed. . . . But I do not want to leave the Tcheka, because I think the work of a Tchekist the most revolutionary, and the most necessary at the present time.

"So let death come rather. . . . And, when I suffer before death . . . I shall certainly be thinking of the fact I have myself hurt and shot.

"But perhaps this is indeed weakness! Perhaps in the work that lies before me, I shall harden myself, and again be stoical and firm. Let this mission be my ordeal.

"For the Communist, every day is a test and an ordeal, as in all of us the attraction of the past is strong.

"As for us, the young Communists, there is no question about it. Few have even their heads out, and for the majority the old world surges over their heads, darkens sight and hearing and muddles their brains. Wherefore one has always to watch oneself. Has not one left the right road? Is one not mixing things up? Is one not becoming Philistine? And I do not want to become a tearful, Tolstoyan intellectual. . . . So let there be an ordeal of physical suffering, of hard nervous work, perhaps of death. From that work I shall either return reborn and strengthened, or not return at all.

"But I shall know that if I, growing weak, have dropped out of the ranks, men such as you, the root and trunk of the Party, remain, and that the struggle

will go on, and that Communism will be throughout the world.

"Live and work well.

"S. Surikov"

VIII

Klimin finished reading and rested his head on his hands.

"It is painful for me," he said, "for I feel myself to blame for his death. I always valued him highly, and he was one of the best political workers in the Division. He went fearlessly into bayonet attacks with the Red Army men, and, in a moment of panic, kept people from running away. There were few such Communists as he among the youth of the Party. But for a Tchekist's work he was altogether too nervous, and I over-estimated him when I took him to work in the Tcheka. Much in his letter I do not understand, and much is simply wrong. Take his attitude towards shooting: although the bourgeoisie describe Klimin as a cannibal, every shooting leaves me with a feeling actually physically unpleasant, like the feeling you have in child-

hood when some sort of evil impulse makes you squash and tease flies on the window-pane. . . . You feel yourself somehow dirty. . . . And I have always been conscious of the blood, the sufferings, the groans, and probably always shall be conscious of them. But he worked like a man under a spell. And only suddenly, somehow, came to see the horrors of a shooting, shivered and was done for. Whereas I, if I do not fall ill, know that I shall go on shooting, without end, just so long as the revolution needs it. . . . I'm sorry for that fellow."

"After all, he was an intellectual," said Stalmakhov quietly. "I do not mean to say anything against him, for there are intellectuals of more than one kind, some like him, useful and necessary to the Party. But I do dislike all that talk, Communism, for and against Communism. . . . Is Communism some sort of philosophy? What is there in it to be talked about? You know, for me, it is a friendly word.

"And in all my life there have been only two such friendly words, that and the word 'nurse'; I named my sister so. My parents died early; I don't remember them, but know only that my father was a shoemaker, and that I was left with a sister, a dozen years older than I. She loved me, caressed me, and gave me the best bits. Her face was not beautiful, wrinkled and yellow, like an old woman's, but for me it was the prettiest in the world. I was just fourteen when she died during an epidemic of cholera, and from that time on I had no friendly word, just as I had no friendly place or home.

"Until the actual revolution, ten years later, I grew up in the streets. Cleaned boots. Sold newspapers. . . . Worked as a lad in a tailor's, a bookbinder's, and then in a printing shop. Wandered about all over Russia. How did I live through it without dying of hunger? Why did I not turn into a drunken beggar? I don't know.

"But the moment the revolution started, it

was as if some one said to me 'Well, Stalmakhov, your life is just beginning. Take it.' I was then working as a postman in a little town in the South, and you know, going from one to another of those snug little houses, listening how those philistine swine rejoiced at the 'bloodless' revolution, that had come by accident, I wanted to shout at them, 'It's not your revolution. . . . You waited for it with full stomachs, but it found me, Stalmakhov, hungry and cold in the road. It brings release to me, and not only release, but also the chance of emptying on some one all the hate piled up in me by my past life.' How I hated at that time! . . . All the well-fed, the bourgeois, the merchants, teachers, doctors, officers, and most of all that cursed ordinary middle-class person.' I did my hating in the revolution before ever I started to love.

"And only later, after I had been beaten for bolshevik agitation, after in Moscow in October I had taken part in the storming of the Kremlin and the shooting of the Junkers, when I was

still not in the Party, and did not understand anything of politics, then, in moments of weariness a promise of rest began to glimmer before me, far away. . . . Like the Kingdom of Heaven for the peasant, far away, but promised absolutely, if not to me then to those who are to come, to my sons or grandsons. . . . And that will be Communism.

"What it will be like, I don't know. . . . Not long ago I took up a book by a man called Bellamy, about Communism, something in the way of a fairy story, and I disliked it so much that I did not read it to the end. Much too much like what things are now, and I feel that it will be so different that it's hard for us even to imagine it. But, when my head is muddled and tired, when work goes badly, when somebody ought to be shot and sometimes you don't rightly know why, then in my mind, I just think my friendly word, Communism . . . and it's as if some one were waving to me with a handkerchief. . . .

"There's a fellow in the Politdep . . .

Martuinov. I heard him lecture. A clever chap, spoke always to the point and so that one could understand. And about the Communist Society—just as if he'd been there! But I saw him at work, in a house-to-house search and . . . even to talk of it is unpleasant. I saw that he and all his talk were not worth a farthing. Surikov, of course, was not like that. He gave his life for the Revolution. And yet he could so easily go off into philosophy like that. . . ."

"Yes, that is true," said Klimin. "We, workmen, somehow take the Revolution differently. . . . Not long ago I had a talk with a comrade, also an intellectual. . . . About the refectory for the responsible workers. He was arguing that the refectory ought to be closed. And in his argument the line of his thinking was like this: the Revolution demands of us that we should keep within the general ration, if only of a skilled workman. [The skilled workmen got more than the rest during the rationing period.] I did not

reason so: we are the Revolution, we are what we call at meetings the forward, the advanced guards. If each one of us, who are carrying on a big work, is to hunger and weaken and break down, of course there will soon be an end of our advanced guards; it's as simple as that! But then, for the intellectuals, the Revolution is something outside, a little God demanding sacrifices, but for me, for example . . . I can say something like what some king or other said, "The State . . . that's me."

He laughed.

"Well, well, it's getting dark, and I promised to go somewhere. . . . Goodbye, Stalmakhov, I beg you, find Karaulov, or telephone to him. . . . I know you'll do your best to find him. Perhaps we shall really have to call the Communist Company to arms. . . . So you'll do it."

"I'll do it."

They shook hands warmly and separated.

And no sooner was Stalmakhov out of sight than Klimin was thinking, with intense, eager delight, of how he was just going to see Aniuta.

This delight pushed its way through care and worry, like the Spring grass through the last thin crust of ice and the cold black earth. It was sad that Surikov had been killed, and Gornuikh's gloomy prognostications kept continually floating into Klimin's tired brain.

Aniuta was waiting for him on the terrace. He walked through the little garden. The sun was reddening the west, mist was rising from the thawing black earth, and the trees were as if recovering from an illness. From far away she noticed the nervous twitching of his tired, thoughtful face. He came up to the terrace, and tenderly stroked her soft hair. She rose from her chair, took his hand and, giving him a firm handshake, asked gently, intimately, "What is the matter with you? What has upset you?" She walked after him into the room and sat on a chair opposite him while he,

just as he was, without taking his coat off, threw himself on the sofa, and lay back with his hands behind his head.

"Nothing," he abruptly replied.

It was the first time that she had seen him upset. At work she had known him sometimes worried and stern, sometimes very angry, but never gloomy.

"He does not want to say," she thought and she was unhappy. Hitherto she had not thought of her love for Klimin, and had never sought it, just as she did not seek luxurious life, delicate food or fine clothes, but accepted everything just as it was. But now, seeing the suffering on the face of this man who was dear to her, and feeling her powerlessness to help him in his suffering, she painfully became conscious of her love for him, and at once his aloofness hurt her. Both were silent, and in that watchful silence he suddenly felt that she was hurt.

"Listen, Aniuta" . . . for the first time he

called her by her name and she blushed with happiness and emotion . . . "don't ask me, don't pay any attention. . . . It's stupid, but I feel as if something were hanging over us all. A fellow can work, work like the devil, but . . . you can't keep track of everything. With me it's just a feeling, but one Tchekist, a very clever, sharp fellow, has been insisting all this week that there is some plot in the town which we have not yet discovered. And you know, to tell you the truth, I am afraid of something. . . ."

She was already sitting beside him.

"Klimin, you have overworked, you have simply overworked yourself and are tired out. You want freshening up. When the fuel-getting is over, go off for a visit to Moscow. You'll come back and get to work again with new strength. I judge by myself. I dawdled about in Moscow for nearly two months, was at two congresses, talked with comrades from abroad, heard Ilyitch [Lenin], Lunacharsky,

and, do you know, I got homesick for our little town, for our little work, and now am settling down to it again with satisfaction.

"You can't do what we have to do at a single sitting, and these moments of rest are inevitable. . . . I know, many think, there's Simkova, hard as a flint, always full of energy and free from doubts. Not long ago a comrade from the Politdep said that to me, you probably know him . . . Martuinov.

"I said nothing, of course, because the weak should always know and feel that some one is stronger than they, but, inside myself, I laughed. If that Martuinov only knew how doubtful I can sometimes be. . . .

"On the way here, I travelled from station to station, and everywhere, on the station, in the wagons, everywhere the same picture, the same complaints, and you could not help seeing how the people are suffering.

"At one railway station there was a sort of big staircase, and from top to bottom it was covered with people. Men, women, children

lying on the steps, together with their pitiable dirty belongings, and on all their faces thin spider's webs of wrinkles of care and misery, under a veil of many days' dirt. And close by in the buffet there was a speculator eating cakes while a hungry homeless little boy watched his mouth greedily, and, when he was given something for charity, went down on the floor to count the dirty scraps of paper money to see if he had enough for cigarettes. And down that terrible staircase, stepping carefully, squeamishly . . . squeamishly is the word . . . came some smart Commissar or other with a Communist star glittering on his breast, and he put down his lacquered boots so carefully among those weary, dirty bodies, and came down and ate cakes with the speculators. And in that crowd there were louse-ridden, starving children . . . I looked at the picture: it was snowing outside and there was a biting wind . . . and then a child, altogether naked, ran out on the cold granite steps, and made water like a little wild beast, on the shining

asphalt of the station front. Just think how many of them must catch cold and die at the station!

"And while I was looking at that staircase, down which, so squeamishly choosing the clean places among the heaps of living dirty bodies, came the fat speculator and the elegant Soviet worker, suddenly the idea dawned on me that it was so in Ancient Rome, in Judæa at the time of Christ, in the Middle Ages and, not long ago, under Capitalism. And I felt so wretched . . . I felt I should like to lie on that staircase, beside those people, be covered with their everlasting dirt, take their lice on my body, and lie there till I died, moving now and then, to make a way for polished boots.

"But sometimes, suddenly, you'll notice a face in the crowd and on it such a proud, human anger against the possessors of clean clothes and shining boots, and it's clear at once that that very anger is a guarantee of our victory. . . . Not now, but some time in the future. . . . So long as such faces are to be

found in a crowd of beggars, it means that the time will come, and we shall win."

She was silent for a minute.

"Yes . . . I talked a great deal with the peasants on the stations. I know how to talk to them in such a way that they never guess that I am of the Party, and talk quite straight. It's amazing how hard, alien and incomprehensible life is for this working, human being, the peasant, in our workers' and peasants' republic. . . . They live side by side with us, see the Revolution with their own eyes, hear it with their own ears . . . and understand nothing at all. If one could only arrange a sort of meeting of all Russia and in simple words, like Robeiko knows how to talk, tell them about everything."

Klimin smiled at her.

"Tell them. . . . They won't understand. Haven't these same working peasants killed enough of our agitators and political workers simply because they preached Communism too openly and directly? They don't read our

books, and they make cigarettes of our newspapers. No, Aniuta, its all much more complicated than that. We have to rebuild their lives. They are savages, living side by side with us but still in the Middle Ages . . . they believe in sorcerers and for them we are only a special sort of sorcerers, benevolent at best. We must destroy those drab villages, those groups of dirty nests in which they roost and put in a museum their primitive ploughs and harrows. . . ."

Both were silent; he took her hand and looked at her, saying nothing, and for her it was as if the whole of her were collected into the little bit of her that touched his hand, and she replied to his caress by pressing her cheek to his hot hand. A painful, powerful ecstasy rose from the depths of his being; he pressed firmly to himself this beloved, desired body, and kissed again her hands, cheeks and lips. . . .

Suddenly there was knocking at the door,

and they heard the sugared voice of the landlady:

"Comrade, here's some sort of peasant asking for you! He wants to know if Comrade Klimin is here. Says it's on important business. . . ."

"Call him here," said Simkova.

The door opened and a human figure came into the dark room. Klimin snapped a benzine cigarette-lighter and with its uncertain light lit up the absolutely unfamiliar face of a bearded mouzhik standing before them.

But before Klimin could ask a question, before he had time to wonder at the unknown man, a familiar voice said quietly and hurriedly:

"Comrade Klimin, I have had a job to find you. There is a revolt in the town. . . ."

"Revolt?" both exclaimed together. Simkova took a Mauser pistol from the wall, loaded it quickly and hung it on her belt.

Klimin caught the mouzhik by the hand.

"It's you, Gornuikh? Tell me what has happened."

"It's a long story. I disguised myself as a peasant, made up my face, joined the crowd and accidentally learnt the whole thing. . . . I know that there is a revolt today, that bands are coming, probably have already arrived. I wanted to telephone, but the field telephone has already been cut, and you know what the town one is like. . . ."

Simkova put on her shawl and jacket. They went out into the street. A soft warm wind was blowing. The earth was rejoicing in the Spring. The gutters murmured in the darkness. And the bent peasant, with a big beard and Gornuikh's voice went on to say:

We are three, and we'll do what we can. Klimin, you go to the Tcheka and get together as many of the lads as you can find. Comrade Simkova had better go to the Communist Company. I'll go to the railway station. The town is probably already surrounded, but looking like this I'll be able to get through the lines

and rouse the railway men. The main thing is not to lose the station. Quick. . . ."

Gornuikh shook hands firmly as a farewell, and then he was already walking away, no longer Gornuikh, but a tall peasant with a long beard. Simkova also said goodbye, shook hands and went off, but then turned and ran back and kissed him with warm lips.

Klimin walked with quick light strides towards the Commission, pressed his revolver with his hand, and, as always in time of danger, was calm and collected, watched everything with a vigilant eye, listened carefully to every sound, but, all the same, it was just as if a vital part of his own body had been torn away from him, torn out with blood and nerves. . . .

IX

Martuinov spent four hours on duty in the Communist Company, walked up and down with his rifle in the big, empty yard, and kept guard over the arsenal. There was a slight frost, but it was not cold, somewhere over the roofs the wind was breathing, diffusing through the air the fresh sweetness of Spring. Martuinov spent the first two hours in thinking, remembering all his past life, punished and forgave himself for a thousand trivial acts, and thought of the Revolution, of the Party, of his work.

But during the last hour, Martuinov did not think of anything at all . . . he simply waited. Waited to be relieved. His toes were freezing, the cold was getting down inside the collar of his coat and up his sleeves, and to keep warm he went through exercises with his rifle.

Twelve strokes rolled out from the belfry, and after that every minute's waiting seemed an hour, and he was wanting to blow a shrill whistle and call the sergeant and ask to be relieved, but the relief was already on its way, and two figures appeared from the direction of the guardroom.

They checked the seals on the doors of the arsenal, and Martuinov went off duty and did not walk but actually ran to the warm guard room. It was as if he were drunk with the Spring air, his face was red, and, as always after being relieved, he felt merry and careless and untroubled by anything of the outer world.

Everything was so clear and simple, everything had been thought out in the big dark courtyard of the Communist Company. He drank hot tea, nibbled sugar, broke bread in his fingers and listened to the talk of the comrades.

"Never in my life will I believe it," said the sergeant, an old non-commissioned officer, with thin, elegantly twisted moustaches. "Is

there any sense in it? I ask you, for man to be descended from a fish or a frog? Wonderful. From a monkey . . . that I've nothing against. . . . Even agree. . . . But from a fish? . . . Sheer fairy story."

"But, Comrade, why from a fish? Not from fish particularly, but from creatures of that sort . . . of very simple form. They lived in water and then the structure of all their bodies was the same. But when they multiplied a lot some of them started going off into the shallows. . . . And thence on to dry land. And their organisms began to adapt themselves to this new way of living. Lungs appeared instead of gills. And that not all at once but gradually, in thousands and thousands of years. The strongest survived and left descendants; in this way there was selection, just as in breeding domestic animals, and that's the struggle for life. Darwin discovered it and so . . ."

Martuinov listened to the clumsy words, watched the play of the broad rough face and

tried to remember; where had he seen that face and heard that slow speech?

The man went on talking and stared at Martuinov, as if he too remembered him . . . but could not bring him to mind. And suddenly he broke off his talk with an exclamation:

"Comrade! Aren't you the son of Sergei Zakharitch? Martuinov?"

"I am," replied Martuinov, and blushed.

"Surely you know me? I am from your father's leather factory. . . . Surely you remember Andreev? At Slobodka they used to call me 'the chemist.' . . ."

And Martuinov recognised that face, the broad forehead, the plain rough features, the small, clear, steady eyes. True, he had aged a good deal, his moustache had grown grey, wrinkles had come on his forehead, he seemed to have grown taller, and a scar cut across his face from eye to mouth. . . . It was nine years since he had last seen him, and only now he remembered the close workroom, the feeble light of a kerosene lamp, and Andreev, young,

in a black shirt with an open collar, bent over a table, heating up some sort of crucibles full of yellow stinking fluid, which he poured over leather while Martuinov's father, a fat old man with a blood-shot face and malicious eyes, in a grey striped suit with a watch-chain right across his stomach, sat very quietly on a bench, smiling encouragingly, stretching an inquisitive neck in the direction of Andreev's hands, and now and again quickly writing something down in his note-book.

The elder Martuinov sometimes took his son with him to the factory, but did not allow him to talk with the workmen. Both in their presence and behind their backs he called them drunkards, thieves and ragamuffins, and only Andreev, "the chemist" as they laughingly called him at Slobodka, he visited himself, and took his son with him.

"Sharp fellow, Andreev," said old Martuinov to Volodya, "bitterly proud, but clever, clever. . . ."

And Volodya had seen that his father, strict

and autocratic even with his family, even with the people of his house, yet bore with the rude and sometimes almost arrogant manner of Andreev, listened carefully to his explanations, full of the names of chemical reagents and technical terms. He had noticed that this young workman was allowed to call his father by his father's name (Sergei Zakharitch, his own and his father's Christian names, as between equals, instead of using his family name, like a stranger or inferior) which not even the very oldest of the workmen had the right to do. And Volodya had not understood the strange relations between them.

And then Andreev had disappeared; his father had had a great row with him about something, Martuinov had not known about what, but for several days his father had been very angry, and had sworn at all the servants, "with the strongest words," as the coachman had delicately expressed it. . . . Martuinov had grown up, had become interested in futurism, in theosophy,

in the history of culture . . . then had come love. . . . Then the Revolution and work in the Party. Andreev had been forgotten altogether. And now here he was, alive, real, sitting there, filling his pipe with tobacco and talking slowly and with pauses:

"Well, Comrade Martuinov, I heard that you were a member of the Party. When I came here I had decided beforehand, I'd come and turn the son of the bourgeois out of the Party. I thought you had come in to serve your own ends. I came and made enquiries about you, where you worked and how, but everybody said you were a good worker and an honest one, and so, thought I, let him work then. . . ."

Martuinov blushed deeply at the praise.

"I broke with my people at the beginning of the Revolution. Broke off all relations with them. I had differences with my father. . . . A despot he was . . . there's no denying it."

"There's no question about it. The man was a flint, and had no pity for people what-

ever. My brother workmen had a pretty hard time, thanks to him."

"But with you personally, he somehow behaved decently?" asked Martuinov.

Andreev smiled.

"Of course, decently, he even gave me cigarettes. . . . Since it paid him to do so. Forgive me, Comrade Martuinov, but about your dad I must say he was a rogue, and a clever one at that. . . . You remember they called me 'the chemist' at Slobodka. That was because I was very fond of chemistry, and found a way of tanning leather by a more scientific and profitable method. But I was a fool then and did not take out a patent for my invention, and your father made use of it for nothing. . . . He gave me three roubles. I bought some books for myself.

"You remember the workmen of Slobodka, they were a rough lot at that time. The work was terribly hard, the pay small, and the only relaxation was to get drunk.

"I did not drink, as a matter of fact to this

day I don't like vodka, I kept away from the lads, was busied with my chemistry and read books. I had nobody to talk with, so I talked with your dad. We talked and talked and behold he brought something new into the factory, and cut down the number of workmen by nearly half. It turned out that I was by way of being a constructing engineer for him, and getting for that fifteen kopecks a day, with tips extra. Sometimes fifty kopecks, sometimes a rouble, sometimes three. At the factory they began to call me 'the cheap chemist,' and it was true enough that I was cheap.

"I was a fool but all the same began to understand a little. And so, said I, Mr. Martuinov, I want to take out a patent for my inventions. You will buy them from me, and I shall be able to study. I dreamed of becoming an engineer. At that time I knew nothing of politics and had no sort of class-consciousness whatever. All I wanted was to study and read books.

"If he had only come to terms with me, perhaps I should have brought him great profit and been an engineer by now. But your dad was mean and his meanness ate him up, and in reply he began to swear at me. And I don't like it when people swear at me. Word for word, we talked pretty straight. And he turned me off. I was very hard up after that. My mother died of hunger. And then I went to Ivanovo-Voznesensk, and met some good fellows, who began giving me *Pravda* to read, and opened my eyes, and I became a bit wiser.

"It's terrible to remember in what a state of oppression they kept us, and how they lorded it over us. . . . Well, anyhow, it's done with, now. There's no going back to the past. Sergei Zakharitch is in Japan now, perhaps, or perhaps in America. And in his factory I am all but master."

"But are you working there now?" asked Martuinov.

"Of course. President of the Factory Committee. Two months already."

"Well, and how is the factory working?"

"Of course—badly. The workmen sabotage, rations are poor and given out irregularly, the system of payment is idiotic, the machines are old and broken. I swore at your dad and dislike him heartily, but there would be no harm for us in taking a lesson from him. . . . To learn this. . . ." He was silent, visibly looking for the right word . . . "this managing. . . . He was hard and cunning and loved his power, but he loved the factory still better. Days and nights he spent in the factory. You remember him? He knew every machine in the place, knew how each workman worked. And, most important of all, he had imagination . . . managing, business imagination. That's what we lack just now.

"Take for example our director. He's an engineer, and they sent him from the All Russian Council of Public Economy, and he's a Communist. . . . But he never comes out of his office. And can't hold his own with the non-party specialists. Do you know him?"

He named a Party comrade, a member of the Party Committee, who often spoke at the Party meetings.

"But I am a bad politician," he went on. "In a word, I was a chemist and still am. Of course I understand it all, all his mistakes, but I cannot catch him out. One to one, I can still argue with him, but at a meeting he's all over me at once. I don't know when you can ask leave to speak and when you can't, and he at once, 'on the motives of the voting' and so on, and so on. I feel that he is lying and falsifying, but catch him I can't, and if I do try to speak, I talk as clumsily as if my tongue were tied in a knot."

"Well, and how is your chemistry going on?"

Andreev's face became gloomy.

"It isn't going on at all. . . . I married, and took up with politics. That was the end of chemistry. It hurts me . . . but it's impossible not to busy oneself with the workmen's cause. If we dawdle, the bourgeoisie

will swallow us alive. That's as much as to say that there's an end to chemistry. . . ."

He grew pensive. It was quiet; the sergeant was snoring loudly; he had fallen asleep with his head on the window-sill.

"Go to sleep, Comrade Martuinov. I can see you are tired out, and it'll soon be my time to go on guard. I'll sit and read . . . 'The Economics of the Transition Period' . . . it's a good little book. . . ."

And Martuinov, half dozing, thought of how many of the workmen members of the Party could do more responsible Party work, and deal with it with more Communistic tact, than certain intellectuals, but that the mechanism of the Party was so arranged as to push forward those who knew how to speak eloquently, preside at meetings and manage them. And he compared Andreev and his disjointed but sensible words with the crackling speeches of that responsible Communist, the director of the leather factory, who was so self-

confident and at the same time so ignorant, did not understand the class-struggle or the fundamental principles of the Party, but was able to hide his lack of knowledge under sounding phrases. And yet, on account of his authoritative baritone voice, his ability in managing a stormy meeting, and his skill in getting the right to speak out of his turn, was elected everywhere and considered very clever and capable.

Suddenly Martuinov's sleepy thoughts were broken into by a loud noise in the passage.

"There's some one there," Martuinov heard Andreev's anxious voice, "Comrade Martuinov, do you hear?"

"It's probably the orderly," murmured Martuinov, ready to slip once more into his light sleep.

"No, no. There's something wrong," cried Andreev, cocking the trigger of his gun.

Martuinov jumped up and saw a crowd of

people pouring through the doors. Angry faces, dishevelled beards, hatchets and guns in their hands.

"Bandits," flashed into his mind. "Probably killed the sentry . . . and now us. . . ."

But he had not carried his thought to its end when the heavy dull sound of a shot reverberated in the room. Smoke filled the room and the fat, red-haired peasant, the first to run into the guardroom, sank heavily on the ground, dropping an elegant cavalry carbine.

"Shoot, Comrade Martuinov. . . . What are you waiting for?" sounded a desperate cry, and, profiting by the confusion of the crowd, Andreev fired a second time.

"Son of a. . . . Filth. . . . Beat them. . . . Beat. . . ."

"I must shoot," flashed into his mind. "It's the end all the same. . . . Shoot," and, with trembling fingers he released the safety-catch. But he had not time to shoot. A heavy blow on the back of the head brought him to the floor. He fell, and, already not knowing

what it was, heard Andreev's third shot, a heavy, resounding noise, covered by the howling and curses of the crowd.

A sharp, intolerable wringing pain seized his breast and throat. He lost consciousness, and did not feel the third blow of the bandit's pike, which smashed his skull in. Emptiness, interwoven with the last perceptions of departing life, blotted out his consciousness. . . .

X

For three days Robeiko had not left the house. He had caught cold, probably in a draught, during the house-to-house search. Towards evening, he grew stronger, but in the night had been very bad again. In the morning he tried to get up, but his head swam, and, swearing energetically, he lay down again, and, without strength to rise, kept to his bed in the big room with green velvet curtains which had formerly been the study of Mr. Senator.

He wanted to eat but there was no one to go to the refectory to fetch his dinner. His hosts were afraid not to give him boiling water; they had agreed to provide two samovars daily. So he drank hot tea and nibbled stale rye-bread.

He had plenty of bread. A whole loaf was standing on the table. Robeiko took all the crust from it with his fingers and crumbled it

up on the table. He was very wretched. He did not blame the comrades for forgetting him; he knew that just now they were too busy to think of him, but he was wretched all the same. It grew dark but he did not light the lamp for he had no wish to read. Memories of his youth floated up, of past work. . . . For some reason or other, he kept remembering the metal-works in the far South, in the Ekaterinoslav Government, where he had spent his youth . . . the Spring of 1905, gatherings in the young birch wood, under the cool canopy of the starry night, and that speech of his, his first, burning, unskilful speech. He remembered some young girl, the brown school-dress she wore, her gestures and smiles. . . . But he could not remember her name . . . Elena was it? . . . Or Olga? . . .

From time to time came fits of coughing, when his eyes swam and ideas and images fled away. Coughing tired him, and he lay with closed eyes, and then, imperceptibly, began to think again.

Today it was particularly quiet in the flat. Madam Senator was not making a noise with her saucepans in the kitchen, and the careful, squeaking steps of Raphael Antonovitch were not heard in the corridor. . . . But all the time, from behind the closed doors, whispers came to Robeiko's hearing, some sort of muttered conversation, and he heard them without understanding them. Suddenly there was a knock at the door and a timorous woman's voice asked:

"Comrade Robeiko, can I come in?"

"Come in," he replied, and saw in the doorway the figure of a woman. It was Lisa Gratcheva.

"You are coughing so badly, Comrade Robeiko, I could hear it in my room. I live next door to you, on the other side of the wall. I have brought you some milk . . . just a cupful. Perhaps I can do something to help you?"

Robeiko looked at the line of light that fell through the half-open door from the passage. Presently this girl would go away, and it would

be dark in the room and he would be alone again. From these thoughts, Robeiko learnt how lonely he was. . . . Probably he would die soon: of course he did not want anything; milk would not do him any good, but he did not want to be alone again.

"Thank you for thinking of it," he said kindly. "Turn on the electric light, and let's drink tea."

She turned the switch and exclaimed. His pillow-slip was covered with the blood that had come from his throat during the coughing. He had not noticed it himself and only now perceived it. . . .

"God save us," she said, "you are probably very ill . . . I'll change the pillow-slip for you. These two days no one has been near you," she said, rummaging in his trunk. "I wanted to come several times, but I was afraid."

He smiled.

"Am I so terrifying?"

"No. You are not terrifying now, but,

when you are in your coat . . . then you do look so proud and unapproachable."

Her care was pleasant, and he smiled kindly and shyly. And she saw his shy smile, and his delicate thin neck with its shrivelled muscles, and was sorry for him and was not afraid of him at all, because she saw him helpless, ill, deprived of his power and strength.

"Where do you work?" he asked.

"I am a Red Army teacher. But for three days I have not been working. Our battalion has gone off to the monastery to get wood."

"It's gone already?" Robeiko interrupted eagerly. . . . "Karaulov was against it. . . . That means that we shall have the wood ready in time." Robeiko actually sat up in bed, and lifted his head from the pillow. She began telling him all that she had heard from the talk of the Communists at the Saturdaying of how the wood-getting was progressing. And she felt, from his animation, how he valued and was delighted at the news.

Robeiko seemed to her even cleverer than

Martuinov, whom she thought very clever, because she could understand nothing of his explanations. She saw his simple, fearless waiting for death, and she felt that if she did not believe in the immortality of the soul she could not wait for death as calmly as he. . . .

Late in the evening, Lisa went off to her room. When she said goodbye, Robeiko asked her to visit him often.

She was waked by the noise of boots and loud talk, sounding in the corridor. There was deep blue darkness out of doors and in the room.

Lisa became anxious at once. On account of the heavy door, she could not make out words, but heard rough voices and the trampling of many feet. She put her boots on with trembling hands. She went to the door and opened it quietly, a little way. . . . She saw in the passage and in the kitchen peasants of some kind in soldiers' great coats, and short fur coats. Some of them had guns in their hands, others, axes and pikes. Among these

weather-beaten rough faces, dirty and unshaved, her eyes instantly perceived three persons whom she knew.

Robeiko, in his underclothes, a bloody weal cutting across his face, stood with his hands bound, barefoot on the cold floor.

Repin was immediately in front of Robeiko; Lisa saw his eagle's nose in profile. As always, he was cleanly shaved, but, instead of his Red Army helmet, he was wearing a black fur hat with a blue ribbon; he was smoking and slashing with a nagaika [whip] at his polished boots. Lisa, glancing at the nagaika, knew at once the origin of the weal on Robeiko's face.

And there, from Repin to Robeiko, from Robeiko to Repin, shaking his fists in Robeiko's face, shouting and gesticulating, was Senator, little and fat, in a blue waistcoat without a coat. . . .

"Ha! Comrade Robeiko! Now I can talk to you. . . . Once more, as an equal to an

equal. Do you hear, you convict, as an equal to an equal? Your robber band requisitioned my shop. . . . I said nothing. You searched me, arrested me for speculation. . . . I said nothing. You forcibly planted yourself in my house and did not pay rent. . . . Still I said nothing. What could I do? Weren't you the Vice . . . VicePresExCom or the VicePresExSov, devil take you together with all your titles! . . . A whole Governor! . . ."

Lack of breath interrupted Raphael Antonovitch, but he took breath and screamed still shriller:

"Now is the end of you. They will shoot you all, like mad dogs, and tomorrow I shall take down the placard from my shop. Do you hear? From *my* shop. Yes, I am rich. You hear, I am a bourgeois. . . . I was a bourgeois, and always will be one. . . . You were a ragamuffin vagabond and always will be. . . . You say nothing? Speak, Comrade

Robeiko, since you are such a good orator. Make a speech, please, for the last time. We'd like to hear you. . . ."

Senator made an artificial, respectful bow to Robeiko. Repin smiled. The bandits laughed loudly. Lisa heard a malicious tittering and in the door of the kitchen saw the laughing face of Madam Senator, her grinning teeth, the wrinkles round her eyes, and a yellow dressing gown with purple flowers.

"You say nothing, you say nothing," Senator bellowed. "Take this!" and he spat a great lump of spittle in Robeiko's face.

Robeiko broke away, but a black-bearded peasant caught him by the shoulders and Robeiko struggled helplessly in his hands, while Senator's spittle trickled down his forehead and into his eyes. Robeiko could not even wipe away the poisonous stuff, for his hands were bound. With scorn and hatred he looked round the mocking crowd, and, looking by accident in Lisa's direction, caught sight of her pale face in the doorway, and

smiled. . . . And from this smile Lisa knew that though Robeiko was suffering from the blows and the insults, his spirit was unbroken, he was not afraid and he scorned his enemies. It seemed to Lisa that Robeiko was smiling because he was remembering their talk in the evening.

The smile woke Lisa from her stupor, and with terrible screams she threw herself on Repin and caught him by the hand.

"Comrade Repin, why are you torturing him? He wished well to the people . . . and to all of you," she cried, turning to the bandits. "He was on your side, for the peasants and workers. . . ."

Laughter and curses drowned her words.

And Repin, the elegant Repin, so handsome and kindly, pushed her away with his full strength, so that she fell against the wall while he cursed her cynically and at length.

"To the devil with this foolery! Take him out, lads, into the street, and there get rid of him at once, sharp now."

The crowd poured out of the door; Lisa, holding her head, got up from the floor.

"You shoving your nose in too," cried Madam Senator. "She, Mr. Officer, is a Bolshevik." And Mr. Senator shook her by the shoulder. Just then a shot sounded in the yard. Lisa knew they were shooting at Robeiko, and screamed so piercingly that even Repin was startled and shaken, and, breaking from the clutching hands of Senator, she ran down the staircase into the dark court. On the steps she ran into a heap of clothes, in which, with groans and sobs a human body was struggling. She stopped, and on the stone threshold saw the face of Robeiko, dripping with blood. Screaming still louder, she rushed from the yard into the street. Two shots crashed in pursuit of her.

Lisa ran to the end of the block, turned into a quiet side street, ran to the middle of the long block, and stopped, breathless. She listened. No one was coming after her. The little houses were quiet and dark, only, from

somewhere far away, she could clearly hear the sound of rifle-fire. Now and again came the regular tapping of a machine-gun. From time to time the wind blew, and Lisa, with nothing on over her tunic, grew cold, and shivers ran down her spine and through her arms.

She walked on mechanically, and wept quietly, the tears pouring down her cheeks and falling in the snow. The fit of horror caused by contact with the squirming body of Robeiko had now passed.

In this way, forgetful of herself, she walked for a very long time, mechanically hiding her hands in the opposite sleeves. It was already growing light when she was walking by some grey palings over which drooped the naked boughs of trees.

Suddenly she shivered and stood still, as if nailed to the spot. On the blue snow, close under the railing, she saw some sort of formless heap. It seemed to her that again she saw the outlines of a human body.

She wanted to scream and run, to run and scream again. But she subdued this feeling of instinctive, panic fear, and went up to the railing, straining to guess at the still indistinct outlines of the dark object. She came nearer; her feet sank in the deep snow, and suddenly, somehow all at once, she saw, recognised, and with a low cry sank on the ground.

Clothes torn to pieces, so that the blue naked body showed through; a woman's clothes, a woman's body; a dark wound above the exposed left breast; stretched out naked hands and uncovered face; tightly screwed up eyes, bitten lips, disordered hair, loose and trodden into the snow. It was the face of Simkova.

Lisa did not scream now, did not weep, but crept over the damp snow to the body, raised the dead head and touched the cold cheeks with the palms of her hands.

And the sky grew blue to the zenith, and colour poured over everything, the little houses of the outskirts, the brown road and the grey trees. One side of the sky turned ruby,

brighter and brighter, just as if a bonfire had been lit there and was blazing up. From over there the sun would shine out, and a pure, almost imperceptible rosy reflection was added to the blue-white of the snowdrifts and the roofs of the houses.

Clearer and clearer Lisa saw Simkova's face, with its grimace of revulsion and anguish, that pale face with the dead, screwed up eyes, which she had seen so lately beautiful and full of the joy of life. It seemed to her that human life had come to its end. There was nothing left but the dead little houses, and the importunate, regular, also death-like, tapping of the machine-gun.

And with dull incomprehension she looked at the simple joyful beauty of the Spring sunrise. . . . Who had any need of this marvellous transparency of the air, of that sun? And why was the noise of the machine-gun broken by the joyful ringing of bells?

But the belfries were rejoicing. . . . The Easter bell-ringing floated over the town, and

the sound of it was interwoven with the tapping of the machine-gun and the noise of rifle-shooting, which was rattling now at both ends of the town.

The Easter bell-ringing reminded Lisa of God. . . . God? Where was he? She no longer felt him in herself. . . . She looked round. . . . Little houses with closed shutters, blue snowdrifts, pale sky. The tapping of the machine-gun and the ringing of bells. The corpse of a girl, so lately full of joy, beauty and understanding. Where was God? In the Easter ringing of the bells, perhaps, with which the priests, in the name of God, were welcoming this day of violence and death?

Robeiko was right, and life was a struggle, and since, over there, from behind those little houses and grey railings, the sounds of rifle-fire were clearly to be heard, the struggle was not yet over. . . . Perhaps life was still going on, since the Communists were still struggling?

Lisa raised herself from the snow. She

rose to her knees. She covered the body of Simkova, and kissed her cold forehead. She got up with difficulty, for her feet were benumbed, and then, as quickly as she could, she went in the direction from which, now quite near by, came the sounds of shooting.

XI

The door opened for a few seconds. . . . The doubtful light of an electric torch fell into the darkness and damp of the cellar. A few curses and blows and Klimin was thrust into the cellar. Again darkness in which was visible the dim blue ghost of the cellar window. There was the noise of steps going off up the stairs.

Klimin had been knocked down by a blow. . . . He stood up and listened. It seemed to him that he heard some sort of rustling.

"Is there any one here?"

"Klimin?"

"Stalmakhov?"

They knew each other by their voices and exchanged handgrips in the darkness. Suddenly Klimin groaned.

"Look out, Stalmakhov, my shoulder is shot through," and, after the momentary happiness, both remembered their situation and felt sad.

"We have both fallen into one trap, Klimin. . . . All the same, I'm glad that it's with you and not with any one else that I shall spend the last night of my life. . . . But I'd be still more glad if you were not here just now, but up there where that shooting is going on. . . . How did you fall into their hands? . . ."

"Gornuikh found me and sent me to the Commission, but the lads had not waited for me in the Commission, but had retreated, fighting as they went, to the railway station. Probably that's why I heard the shooting not from the direction of the Commission but as if it were on one side, further to the left. I fell into an ambush close to the Commission. They shot me in the right shoulder. My arm hung loose at once, like a whip. Or they would never have got me alive. They recognised me at once, of course. Who of that

filth does not know Klimin? They knocked me about . . . pretty badly. But now, Stalmakhov, it looks as if they had too much on their hands to think of us. Such a fire has started from the direction of the railway station, it's clear enough they are finding things hot, or they'd never have left us in peace. But did you find Karaulov?"

"No. . . . He had gone off somewhere. They got me with an ambush too. But I laid one of them out all the same. The third shot I meant for myself but it missed fire. They kill you, that's nothing. But they will torture me badly. I did the corn-collection throughout the district. So far they have not recognised me. But how I want to smoke, Klimin. It's more than I can bear. And, more than I want to smoke, I want to live." He tried to laugh but could not, and broke off with a sigh. "Klimin, you are here, and already I'm thinking of being saved. That's because you did save me from death once.

Remember, during the collection of provision toll?"

"I remember. It was nothing."

"No brother, it was not nothing. The noose was round my neck when you rode up with your lads. I was then expecting death for certain, but you brought salvation. Perhaps it'll be the same now."

"No. It seems this time we are really done for, Comrade Stalmakhov. I remember it well now, and pale you were when we were cutting the ropes off your wrists with a sword. That was when we became acquainted."

"True. A year and a half I've known you. After that we worked together on the District Committee. . . . I always liked being with you, and always wanted to say so, but when we met, it was never more than 'Good day,' 'Good-bye,' or 'Give me a light,' and that was all the talking we did."

Both were silent. The shooting over towards the railway station grew more distant,

and sounded duller, and duller. What with blows, loss of blood and anxiety, Klimin was seized with weariness. He lay on the floor and touched the cold flagstones with his forehead. And he thought of how in this cellar of the Tcheka many hundreds of people, sentenced to death by him, had awaited death just as now he, Klimin, was awaiting it. He remembered single sentences from Surikov's letter, his words about pity for the sufferings of another's organism.

But suddenly the vivid remembrances of Simkova cut into his mind like the blow of a whip. Simkova, Aniuta! He was not going to see her again! But that was impossible! He must see her! In his head began to spin a fiery, many-colored kaleidoscope of plans of escape. He thought of the big oaken bolts of the door, of the little cellar-window. . . . But, as President of the Tcheka, he knew too well that during the whole time of his work, there had not been a single case of an escape

from this cellar. It was clear that there was no hope. . . .

But the noise of shooting became clearer and nearer.

"Our folk are coming nearer," said Klimin, and Stalmakhov began to swear. His curses, long, cynical and filthy, rang with the notes of a burning, flaming hope.

On the other side of the door there was a sound of steps, and then the turning of the lock.

"For us," said Stalmakhov. And Klimin had no time to answer before they had laid hold of him and were pushing him and knocking him about. . . .

"Take the swine to the Chief!" a stentorian voice shouted into the darkness.

Klimin tried to fight himself free, but they hit him on the head with a club. He lost consciousness and they dragged him up the narrow staircase with its rotting, wooden steps, as if he were a heavy sack. Stalmakhov walked up

by himself, and his pock-marked face, covered with blood, was calm as ever.

The night had wholly dispersed, and there was a blue sky with a ruby East. Stalmakhov looked at the pale face of Klimin, whom they were dragging along by the arms, and threw a glance round the big inner courtyard of the Tcheka, which was shut in by two-story buildings and a high stone wall. A blue flag was leaning against the wall of the little house in which formerly had been the refectory of the Tcheka workers. A pile of rifles were scattered about and a boy with a blue cockade in his cap was fitting locks to them. The torn skin on Stalmakhov's forehead smarted from the fresh wind.

"Ah, whom have we here? . . . Comrade Stalmakhov who so carefully collected the corn-toll from the Dmitrov district? See what a bird we have caught!" Stalmakhov heard the malicious, mocking words. Grey, insolent eyes looked at him out of a pink, clean-shaven face under a shaggy fur hat. A well-built

figure, gripped at the waist by an officer's broad leather belt. . . . "You don't recognise me, eh? But we are old acquaintances. Besides we met quite recently. Surely you have not forgotten the Military Specialist, Repin, whose documents you looked through during the search? We did not happen to thank you then for your careful collection of the corn-toll, but we will settle our account now. . . ."

Klimin came to himself when a bucket of cold water had been thrown over him and, at once, tottered to his feet. He was shivering with cold and his head felt as if it were flying to pieces.

As soon as he stood up he saw Stalmakhov, whom two young fellows were holding by the arms. A third in nothing but a blue shirt was flogging Stalmakhov on the back with backhand blows, satisfaction shining on his bony browless face, with its narrow slit eyes. Stalmakhov groaned now and again, and, together with his groans, bitter curses flew from his mouth. Repin was standing on the steps. He

turned to Klimin, smiled maliciously and insolently, and was just going to say something when some one shouted for him and he unwillingly went out.

They were carrying a wounded man through the yard. A grimace of pain was twisting his pale face, but he, with difficulty lifting his head from his comrade's shoulder, cried out to the men who were flogging Stalmakhov:

"That's the stuff, brothers. . . . Lay into him Vaska!"

The rifle-shots were rattling not more than half a verst away, and sometimes a ricocheting bullet flew over the yard with a resonant wailing hum. And suddenly, breaking through the monotonous rattle of the shooting, there gushed out a powerful wave of shouts of anger and triumph, mingled with shrieks and groans. . . . After that the shooting came suddenly nearer, bullets flew more and more often over the courtyard, every other minute smashing windows in the upper story of the building.

Repin ran into the yard and with him an-

other officer, on whose shoulders Klimin saw epaulettes.

"Harness the horses!" shouted Repin, and the two of them went hurriedly out of the gates.

The flogging of Stalmakhov came to an end of itself. The bandits rushed to harness horses to a cart, and Stalmakhov, no longer supported by any one, tottered and fell in the snow, thin streams of blood pouring from his back.

Klimin ran to him and began to lift him to his feet, getting his hands smeared with the blood. Stalmakhov groaned, trembled and cursed but none the less stood up, tottering. He looked with agony in Klimin's eyes, and whispered with grey lips: "It's cold. . . . Death has come, sure enough. . . ." Klimin took him by the shoulders, and putting out the last of his own strength, dragged him into a little barn at the far end of the yard.

"Come on. We'll hide, and perhaps they'll forget us."

In the twilight of the barn, the back of his head pressed into the horse-dung on the floor, lay the mutilated body of Ziman. His entrails, scraps of scarlet, white and purple flesh, mixed up with rags of clothes and horse-dung, were scattered on the ground, and a heap of corn had been poured into his ripped-open and disembowelled stomach. A torn sack of corn lay beside him. Terrific suffering was written on Ziman's little, thin, sharp-nosed face. One of his eyes was wide open, and into the other had been pushed a broken splinter of glass from his spectacles.

"He, too, carefully collected the corn-toll," Stalmakhov whispered hoarsely, dropping on a log and covering his face with his hands.

The shooting came still nearer. One of the bandits was wounded in the yard and sank with a scream on the snow. They carried out the wounded and put them in one cart and shoved a pile of rifles into another. Two officers ran out from the doors of the Tcheka building, and with them a civilian in a very good new shuba

[fur coat] and spectacles. He carried several portfolios of papers, and in the hands of the officers were revolvers. They had made ready for them the victoria, the same in which, so lately, Klimin had driven to meet Simkova. Stalmakhov and Klimin, it seemed, were entirely forgotten. Suddenly Repin, on a foaming horse, rode into the yard. His face was pale, anxious and angry.

"Bring the prisoners here," he shouted. "Where are they?"

With shouts and curses they dragged out Klimin and Stalmakhov. Stalmakhov looked with cold hatred deep into Repin's grey angry eyes, and was going to say something. But a shot rang out and, irrationally jerking its hands and feet, his body fell on the snow.

There was a second shot and a second body writhed in the snow beside the dying first. The yard emptied. Repin galloped off after the carts and the victoria. For fifteen minutes the two dead bodies lay motionless in the middle of the yard, while the shooting came

nearer and nearer and then began to go off already in the opposite direction, while the bullets flew more and more rarely over the empty yard.

The sun was already hanging above red clouds and the sky was turning blue. . . . Gornuikh ran into the yard with a revolver in his hands. At his heels were three men in black short coats with red stars on their black fur hats, gripping their rifles firmly in their strong, dark brown hands. They were the Communist railwaymen. They rushed to examine the barn. Gornuikh ran at once to the dark mass on the snow, and saw the familiar face, the dead eyes, the calm, half-opened lips, from which it seemed that at any moment would escape a white-toothed smile that would make the face young once more, in spite of its grey skin and network of wrinkles. . . .

And, lifting Klimin's head on his knee, Gornuikh bent over it, and looked endlessly into this motionless face. And suddenly he felt that a sob was rising from the depths of

his being, from depths of which he had not known himself, higher, and higher. . . . Gornuikh wept silently with a dry sobbing that was so painful that it was as if not one but several hearts, more hurt, more disturbed than they could bear, were beating in his breast.

XII

The black, melting earth and the blue drifts of the last snow mingled together in a whimsical pattern stretching far, far away, and the changes in its various, ever new design were still monotonous.

Karaulov looked sharply about him, listened keenly in the darkness, and held the reins in a special manner, making his horse step carefully and silently.

Before him, in a wide two-verst semicircle, embracing the empty ravines, ditches and low hills, towards the town, moved three lines of Red Army soldiers, one behind the other. The order had been given to make no noise. But the moving of the thousands of feet on the earth seemed a loud noise to Karaulov, and the sharp-eared beasts of the field, foxes, hares and field mice, heard it for many versts, far, far

away . . . it was like the monotonous gushing of a flood in the steppes, and they noiselessly fled from it. But a few hours earlier, Karaulov had been hurrying his brave little horse over this very place, galloping from the town towards the monastery where was the battalion of the Tcheka.

He had gone as if merely to make sure how the fuel-getting was going on, and to see if his telephonogram about precautionary measures had been obeyed. But some cloudy instinct had taken him from the town and told him to be as near as he could to the battalion. And that same cloudy instinct had made him stop his horse now and again and listen to the town he had left behind.

But under the fading evening sky everything was quiet, and as before the scent-laden, sweet, cool stillness of an evening in early Spring ruled over the earth. And then, when it was altogether dark, and the ruby trace of the sun had dissolved in the dark blue sky, and the first timorous stars were glimmering out, the

keen ear of Karaulov caught, suddenly, from the direction of the town, one after another, three far-away shots.

Karaulov checked his horse. Silence. A crow called, flying across. And then again he heard a far distant shooting . . . a disorderly bundle of sounds.

He spurred his horse and with all his strength struck it with his nagaika, and it dashed forward at a swift trot, avoiding the deep pits and ditches invisible in the darkness.

Arriving at the monastery, he enquired if his telephonogram had been obeyed, assured himself that everything had been done, shortly explained the character of the operation to the battalion commander, Seletsky, and, fifteen minutes later, before the quiet ranks of the Red Army men, told them briefly what was on foot. And then, as they rode out into the country, he explained to the military Commissar of the battalion, Danilov, elegant, good-looking, in leather coat and broad red riding breeches, the

political meaning of the revolt, and Danilov in reply nodded his handsome head that he carried lightly on his strong neck. Danilov had been a miner, unable to read or write, and even now he read with difficulty, and indeed had not been able to even read "The A B C of Communism" all through, but the Red Army men loved him for his simplicity, which they divined under all his elegantly got up equipment, while Karaulov thought well of him for his boldness, for his honesty, for his directness and also because sometimes they had a drink together.

Seletsky, meanwhile, was riding from end to end of the battalion, assuring himself over and over again that everything had been done as it should have been done. . . . It seemed that the line was properly deployed, machine-guns in the centre, and patrols sent out on the right flank, together with cavalry scouts. . . .

Everything had been done, and presently Seletsky would meet the enemy once again, and once again would be solving in human lives

that familiar, but every time new and interesting military problem. Once again to meet the enemy . . . the bandits. . . .

But no matter whom. . . .

Were not religion, nationality, class, merely coloured, modifying denotations, concrete denotations through which were expressed the abstractions of the great game of war? Of the beloved game of death which, for Seletsky, was like an intoxicating narcotic. . . . And he remembered how seven years before Ensign Seletsky . . . then against the Germans . . . led his company to the attack, and was full of enthusiasm and dreamed of a heroic death for Russia. And then, in the opaque gloom of the trenches, what with illness, contusions and wounds, this enthusiasm had withered. But in its place there had grown up a new, painful interest in this deadly game at which for so many years on end the whole of mankind had been playing, in this oldest of all games, in this most beloved of all children's games. . . . And now it was all the same to

Battalion Commander Seletsky. . . . Germans, Poles, Czecho-Slovaks, Cossacks, Whites, bandits . . . all the same. . . . Before him was an enemy who also would be throwing out his lines, sending out scouting antennæ, pouring out rifle-fire, and flinging forward the flame of bayonet attacks. And the suffering, wounds and deaths were merely algebraic signs to express the quantitative changes in the opposing sides.

And the telephonogram received in the morning had been for Seletsky what a light pressure of the bridle is for a good and mettled horse; he had instantly pulled himself together, carried out all the instructions, had waited all day expecting the alarm, and had been in no way surprised at the arrival of Karaulov.

And now, every half hour, he rode up to Karaulov, reported briefly on the progress of the operation, set out his hypotheses and asked respectfully:

"Will there not be such and such orders, Comrade Brigade Commander?"

And all the time Karaulov became less and less suspicious, and thought to himself: "Well, this one will not betray us."

No. Seletsky will not be a traitor. To be a traitor is to break the rules of the game. Once you have chosen yourself a place in the game, stick to it. Otherwise there is no interest in playing.

The first company was advancing on the left flank.

A dark mass of people was moving forward, but in that mass, in that row of silhouettes, was its own system and internal organisation. . . . Each man knew his neighbour and his chief, each obeyed the quiet command. Political Leader Spitsyn marched in the ranks, his rifle firmly on his shoulder.

From time to time, in a whisper, he shared his ideas with his neighbour, Fidein, a short, snub-nosed fellow, with sharp, bright blue eyes.

Fidein remembered everything and understood everything. . . . He was as greedy of knowledge as dry sand is of water. And

Spitsyn was for ever boasting of his pupil who was already a candidate for admission to the Party. Yet, when his relations from a neighbouring village came to see Fidein, his father, a stout peasant with shrewd eyes and a brown beard, or his sisters, taciturn and gloomy, blue-eyed like their brother, and there began long whispered talks somewhere in a corner of the barracks. Fidein grew gloomy and morose, kept himself to himself, and would no longer talk with the Political Leader. . . . And Spitsyn waited and knew in advance; the moment would come, and the lad would break out, all red, with shining eyes, gesticulating uniformly and energetically with his right hand, and would start talking of the improper collection of the corn-toll, of bribes taken by the local committee, of the misdeeds of the militia and of the district food commissar, of the whole miserable muddle of village life.

And Spitsyn would listen without interrupting, and would then begin to explain, and would talk for a long time about the dif-

ficulties of revolution in Russia, of how the peasants were themselves to blame for not knowing how to deal with abuses, of how many had joined in for their own ends and were consciously putting difficulties in the way.

And suddenly a group of attentive Red Army men would collect about them, would listen, smoking their cigarettes, and would ask questions. . . . And the Political Leader would find what to say to each one of them: it was not for nothing that he was himself from the country.

In questionnaires, opposite the question as to social origin, Spitsyn was accustomed to write himself down as "village inhabitant." He was a village tailor, and did not know whether to call himself a peasant or a workman. Tall, narrow-chested, round-shouldered and bald, his face was pale and freckled, his step even and light, and his little eyes looked always openly and straight before them.

The Red Army men liked his talks, only his voice was very squeaky, and they were always

shouting to him, "Louder, louder," but Spitsyn could not talk very loudly, for if he tried to he immediately lost the thread of his argument, and began to use foreign words which the Red Army men did not understand, and to which he himself gave cloudy and approximate meanings. And now, in the ranks, in these quiet, dread minutes of waiting for battle, first one and then another came up to him, smoked, talked, and asked him to explain more definitely:

"Against whom are we marching? And why?"

And, conscious of the perplexity in those peasant souls, perplexity from the fact that . . . they had to march against their own folk . . . against peasants . . . Russians . . . brothers . . . Spitsyn with careful, clear, sharp words, spoke of the rebels and reminded the men about Denikin, about Judenitch, about Kolchak. . . . And again the lines moved on over the dark country, under the deep blue sky and the few stars, and

with each verst, ever louder and louder was heard from the town a distant, clear fusillade. They marched on, until from man to man, from squad to squad, from platoon to platoon, from company to company, ran the command:

"Halt! Dress the line by the right!"

Already the rare lights of the town were twinkling before them, and on one side the river showed, dim and white. And Karaulov's mare, which carried him sleeping on her back, also stopped, half a verst behind the line. The Military Commissar of the battalion, riding beside him, caught her by the bridle and checked her carefully: "Let the old man have his sleep," he thought.

But Karaulov instantly started sharply, woke up, and standing up in his stirrups, looked keenly ahead and listened carefully. . . . He knew at once the place, the lights of the town, the river, the ravine.

The Battalion Commander rode up and reported in a whisper, his hand respectfully at the salute:

"The reconnoitring party have returned. They have been to the outskirts of the town, and have seen a big band coming in our direction. . . . Better for us to await them here. We have a good position here."

"Yes, yes," said Karaulov.

"The shooting over by the railway station," continued the Battalion Commander, "means that some of our side are there. I have sent to get in touch with them. But so far no one has returned."

"Right, Comrade Battalion Commander," said Karaulov. "You, Danilov, stop here, while we have a look at the position."

But they had not ridden off more than a few yards, when they saw before them the quickly growing silhouette of a horseman, and heard the loud beating of a horse's hoofs.

"Another scout," said the Battalion Commander.

The three horsemen rode to meet each other. The Red Army men, looking behind them, saw a fantastic, many-headed, living mass. . . .

Suddenly three of the heads disappeared and nothing was left but the silhouettes of the horses, as the horsemen hurried on their way.

"Lie down," ran along the lines. . . . "Prepare for action!"

And the order had not reached the left flank before, on the right . . . tok, tok, tok . . . tapped out a machine-gun, and one after another, interrupting, pursuing each other, light shots flew by.

Karaulov hardly had to interfere with the progress of the operation. He nodded his head approvingly at all the orders of the Battalion Commander, saw in the scanty light of dawn his face, unshaved, with a growth of red hair, his tight-closed lips, and listened to him with more and more attention, while his voice at the same time grew more and more friendly. Karaulov arrested only one of Seletsky's orders. He forbade the use of machine-gun fire on the little houses of the outskirts.

"But what if they are firing from there?" asked Seletsky in surprise.

"We mustn't, all the same. . . . Might hurt peaceful inhabitants," replied Karaulov.

The first company, slowly, running forward a few yards at a time, advanced towards the town. The place was open and low, and a lot of snow had stayed there, half-melted, and falling in under the heavy feet of the soldiers. The grey figures made good marks on the blue snowdrifts.

They moved forward slowly and lost many killed and wounded, and when in the blue morning mist, on the hillock by the railings and little houses, Spitsyn saw the distant lines of the enemy, the edge of the sky was already bright scarlet and the sun was on the point of gliding up from behind the rolling faraway horizon. Spitsyn was now not thinking of anything. Fastening his cartridge-belt so that he could quickly and easily get at his cartridges, he aimed smartly, fired, and the rifle thundered at his ear, and jerked in his strong hands as if it were alive. Then, stooping, he ran breathlessly to the next hillock, fell on his knees, took

aim once more, and again the rifle thundered at his ear. Fidein had been slightly wounded in the left shoulder, but the bone had not been touched and he remained in the ranks. Spitsyn bandaged him silently, and then they ran on again, one beside the other, and poured in the direction of the little houses and railings of the outskirts, white puffs of smoke, and invisible terrible bullets.

In times of peace, Danilov never thought of war and battles, but lived for his own pleasure, spoke at meetings, rode to the Politdep to have a row with Martuinov, and did not mind drinking and flirting with a pretty girl. But war came along and seized Danilov, only not like Seletsky as a director of fighting operations but as a soldier in the ranks. Always in battle he marched in the first line, and from far away the Red Army men saw the shining leather jacket and the scarlet riding breeches of the Commissar.

And now he had already asked Karaulov and Seletsky several times: "Give me a com-

pany and I'll go for them with the bayonet." The Battalion Commander, not understanding him, shrugged his shoulders and turned away, and Karaulov swore at him briefly but forcibly.

Danilov had been offended and had gone to the first company to find his friend Spitsyn, whom he respected for his brains, though he laughed at him now and again. He wanted to share his resentment with him. He walked up behind the lines, sometimes distinguishing near the railings the small dark figure of an enemy and shooting at it with his revolver. Friendlily and cheerfully he greeted the Red Army men, and coming up to the flank of the first company, he had already seen Spitsyn's bent back, and was just going to call him, when, suddenly, looking towards the nearest houses of the outskirts, he saw a black spot swiftly coming nearer. He looked at it sharply and keenly and stood still. A few bullets whistled over his head. But he went on staring and suddenly roared out:

"Comrades, some woman or other is running. Be careful how you shoot."

Already they all saw her. Her hair was loose in the wind, and now and again she fell, screamed piercingly, and ran on again. In pursuit of her, from the enemy's lines, poured shot after shot. And suddenly Fidein shouted out in his ringing young voice, and his words were carried far along the line:

"Lads, it's our schoolmistress, it's Comrade Gratcheva!"

Others supported him:

"Yes. Yes. It's she, herself!"

Danilov ran forward with his revolver.

"Now then, Comrades, to the rescue of our schoolmistress. Come on to meet her! Forward!"

"Lie down, Comrade Gratcheva! Lie down in the snow!" Fidein shouted to her. Lisa did not understand at first what these people were shouting at her. But then she saw the line running towards her, nearer and nearer, and at last fear no longer prevented

her from recognising the familiar faces.

There they all were, dear ones, her own, more than her own! The lads she had taught the multiplication table to in the school, now armed with terrible rifles, they seemed to Lisa a powerful avenging force, a force of triumphant justice. She fell on the snow.

"How did you come here?" she heard a sharp voice, and lifting her head she saw a stern sky overhead only faintly turning blue, a dim red sun, a grey mass of houses on the hill close by, and she heard the irregular sounds of the fusillade, threaded by the monotonous tapping of the machine-gun. Immediately before her, on a background of dark earth and white snow, she saw a grey, literally bloodless face, matted eyebrows, wrinkled cheeks and thin beard, and recognised the Brigade Commander, Karaulov. She was not afraid of him as she had been formerly, but, weeping, began to tell him what she had lived through during the night.

Karaulov, not interrupting, heard the de-

tails of Robeiko's death, heard in silence the tale of Simkova's corpse, which was still lying there . . . under the grey railing . . . and Karaulov's face was motionless, except for some muscle that jerked in his cheek. But when the Battalion Commander interrupted her disconnected narrative with a brief report that connection with the railway station had been established, and that Comrade Gornuikh, the Tchekist, was there with fifty railwaymen of the Communist Company, Karaulov commanded in reply, abruptly:

"Danilov! Go for them with the bayonet. Now I permit it. Finish them off, sons of dogs! Begin with the left flank. . . . Seletsky! Fire down the streets with the machine-guns. . . . Take no prisoners."

And then he caught Danilov, who was delighted at the command, by the hand, held him a moment, and whispered: "Did you hear? They have killed Robeiko. . . . When the town is taken, I shall drink like sand. . . . But now, advance!"

XIII

Over the purple-brown distance of the fields, catching at the grey roofs of the houses, slowly, hanging low, heavy, damp, quiet masses of clouds floated up. They sowed a thin drizzle, hesitating, timorous, but joyful, like the first caress of love, like the trembling approach of a youth to the naked female body. The hills were invisible—the misty net of rain hid them, and under the low cloudy canopy the world was small and constricted, but the air was growing warm and saturated with moisture, just as it is under the glass of a garden-frame, dimmed with a dull film of tiny drops of water.

The light wind, lazy and capriciously changing direction, carried from the fields to the town the intoxicating aroma of the dissolution of the old life and the beginning of

the new, and, from the town to the fields, noises, knockings, whistles and church-bells. Konstantin Petrovitch was drinking in both one and the other with his whole being: he was standing on the sandy hill—there is a solitary weather-beaten rock there—and looked down at the pile of houses and the railings, the mass of churches, and the picture of the quiet little town, tedious, familiar in all its details, seemed to him transparent, and sewn with tarnished thread on an ancient faded curtain.

Some one strong and bold would finally tear it up, and there would shine out from under it the variegated colours of a new life, alien and hostile to Konstantin Petrovitch, and glowing with a beauty that he would not be able to understand. Life, like an aged snake, was once more changing its skin, was throwing off the old one, faded and wrinkled, and under it were being revealed the bright patches of the never yet seen pattern of the new life. Were not these the bright patches that even now were lighting up the grey picture seen through the

smoke of rain, the scarlet flag on the building of the Circus, yes, and the red placard over the chemist's shop in the square?

And Konstantin Petrovitch looked back on the past life of the Russian people, that went on on the background of those wild misty fields, in little grey towns, in the innumerable villages, the life that had been painted by Pushkin, Turgenev, Tchekhov . . . and hundreds of other Russian writers, who wept over that life that was now for ever gone, described it so truly, and continually enchanted Konstantin Petrovitch with its melancholy beauty. For twenty years he had taught literature in the Gymnasium of the town, for twenty years, year by year, he had read through the elegantly bound books that filled two cases in his little study. Their ranks had grown much thinner since the Revolution. . . . Margarita Semenovna, the elderly woman who was for him both wife and servant, was exchanging them for meat, groats, flour and eggs.

After all, one had to live. "On principle,"

he had not gone to work in the Soviet school, he knew no trade, and his stores and savings had soon been eaten up. From week to week, from month to month, from year to year, he had lived all through the Revolution in the hope that the bloody, hated, incomprehensible power of the Bolsheviks over his country was on the point of falling, and that the old real life would return. He had hated the Bolsheviks ever since the first threatening thunder of the October Revolution; they were entirely strange to him; there had not been any of them in his past life; their doings, behaviour and speeches, were for him alike incomprehensible and full of contradictions. The Bolsheviks seemed to him low and brutal and at the same time devilishly cunning, lying Jesuits and at the same time narrow, inflexible doctrinaires. The mere sight of the Soviet posters in the streets upset him, and he hardly left his house, did not open all the shutters even in day-time, shrivelled up, let himself go, started drinking home-made spirits, quarrelled over nothings

with Margarita Semenovna, and for whole days on end either played patience or lolled on the sofa and re-read the books of his diminishing library.

The Czecho-Slovak revolution destroyed his hopes of a return of the old order of life. He saw then the abuses, robbery and bribery of the governing bourgeoisie, the ignorance, stupidity and senseless cruelty of the officers. He was sorry for the Whites and contemptuous of them, behaved towards them with the feeling of a father for a drunken idle son who had not justified the hopes that had been set upon him. The life of people in this world began to seem to him a miraculous absurdity, and he was visited by misanthropic dreams of the destruction of all mankind.

On the day of the revolt, from morning on, vague rumours went about among the townsfolk who had been mobilised for the getting of fuel. When in the evening, after a preliminary roll-call, they had been shut up in a big dark room and heard from the courtyard

the disturbing, warning roll of the drum, malice and fear, joy and anxiety, filled the room with laughter, shouts and a rumbling, angry murmur. And then Karaulov himself, accompanied by two respectful silent figures, came into the room, and threw the light of an electric torch on the now quieting crowd. Under the thin light of the torch he saw on all those faces, old and young, beautiful and ugly, clever and stupid, on all of them glee, hope and terror: he understood, and said, not loudly, but so that all could hear, addressing the Commander of the Third Company, Zhourbin, dark, well-made, with a slight squint, standing respectfully at attention, who was to be left with his company to guard the monastery.

"In case of anything . . . instantly. . . . You understand?"

"Just so, Comrade Commissar," replied Zhourbin and smiled boldly, squinted at Karaulov, squinted at the silent crowd of townsfolk and seemed to them a devil with fiery powerful body, smoky face, the crooked glance

of cruel, handsome eyes, and the satanic horn of a Red Army helmet.

During that dark, nervous night in the big, close room, no one slept; they whispered, whispered, whispered and went through the names of the Communists with glee, remembering their mistakes, and hoped, hoped, hoped.

And Konstantin Petrovitch also did not sleep, but lay on a narrow hard bench, covering himself with his coat, turned from side to side and thought continually. He did not believe in the success of the revolt, and did not sympathise with it, remembering the experience of the Czecho-Slovak mutiny and the Kolchak time. The Communists were still alien to him, and he did not believe the things they wrote on their red flags, and for the sake of which they so devotedly died. But, since the people, the workmen, the Red Army soldiers —those peasant lads in soldiers' coats—for so many years had obeyed them, these preachers of the International, obeyed this revolution-

ary sect that was in composition only half Russian, then, perhaps, they were indeed bringing with them some sort of vital truth. Perhaps if he had tried working with the Bolsheviks. . . . Perhaps then he would have found this truth of theirs. But he had lain on his sofa and read his books in their fine bindings . . . and eaten them. . . . He read a funeral service over his past life.

And as soon as one company returned to the monastery and it became known that the revolt had been suppressed, Konstantin Petrovitch asked Zhourbin for leave to go to the town for the day, to change his worn out boots, and at the same time, as he decided privately, to go to the Popeduc [Popular Education Department] and to ask if some work could not be found for him. Besides he wanted to look with new eyes on the loathed little town that had eaten up all his life, and on the unloved but familiar Margarita Semenovna, than whom, after all, he had no one nearer in the world. And so, from the morning, under that

thin drizzle that was falling, beside the slow carts that were taking fuel to the town, Konstantin Petrovitch had trudged, listening to the talk of the peasants and the Red Army soldiers who were convoying the carts: talk of the sowing, of how it was time to be ploughing but the Anti-Christs, the Bolsheviks, were making them carry wood in the thaw; of how there was no seed for the sowing; of how the Communists were swindlers, promising goods in exchange for food and then sending to the country not nails, iron, crockery or calico, but starched collars, powder and lip-salve. . . .

"Ugh, the Anti-Christs!" said a peasant.

"It's some one purposely putting spokes in the wheels," replied a shy, crimson-faced Red Army man. "The Tcheka ought certainly to be told of it. . . ."

The peasant shook his head hopelessly:

"The Tcheka won't help. There are Communists there too, and they stick by each other."

But another Red Army man was explaining to a group of peasants:

"This wood you are carrying is for the railway, and by the railway we are to bring the seed. . . . For the sowing I suppose. . . . All this Spitsyn told us, the Political Instructor, a good comrade . . . and I read it in the paper. . . .

"And whoever mutinies now, whoever prevents us from getting things going, is our enemy," he said with heavy hatred; "and I'd have no mercy on my own brother if he turned bandit."

"I do not know anything," dejectedly said the oldest peasant with a grey beard and faded eyes, "but I feel in my soul that we shall all die of hunger if the Empress of Heaven, our Mother who pleads for us does not help us." And, looking from the hill towards the gold crosses of the churches in the town, hearing the thin, church bell ringing, he took his fur hat from his bald head and crossed himself, and, after him, the others crossed themselves also.

And Konstantin Petrovitch, in a little old uniform coat of the Ministry of Education, also crossed himself with a little cross, and, looking at those grey, uneducated peasants, at the grey town, the purple-brown distance of the fields, the misty day, his heart wept for that form of life which was growing still for ever, wept in time with that complaining ringing of bells, which with dejectedly lowered wings floated over the town in that inexpressibly simple hour when the sun, like a dull white spot, had long passed noon and was throwing the pale semi circle of the rainbow over the purple-brown, distant fields. . . .

The Red Army men frowned, looking at the mouzhiks crossing themselves, and then one, the youngest of all, said mockingly, "Well, well, we've prayed, let's get along. . . . And you, Mister, don't lag behind," he added, to Konstantin Petrovitch. The train of carts moved slowly forward, and Konstantin Petrovitch saw how from all parts of the town, across the broad square, people were coming

together to the Circus Building, walking singly and in groups, young and old, men and women. Different faces, smiles, gestures, gaits, and yet there was something common to them all, as if one and the same distant, morning sun was lighting them all. And Konstantin Petrovitch guessed that these were the Communists, gathering for the Party Meeting.

This was the first Party Meeting after the revolt, and, for the Communists, the church bells sounded like the blowing of an enemy trumpet, an insolent reminder that the struggle was not yet over, that the enemy had retired but had not been broken; each one heard it, and blinked, but then remembered that a victory had been won, that after all the revolt had been put down, and each one shared his feeling of joy with his comrades. And together with the others, Lisa Gratcheva went timorously to the meeting, came to the entrance of the Circus, but could not make up her mind to go in. In vain Lisa sought in the crowd for faces that she knew. It was as if all of

them had been killed during the revolt, but there, see, in a clean great-coat, with golden shining buttons, a Communist star on his breast, Comrade Matusenko himself, secretary of the Politdep, drawing out of his pocket his clean ticket of membership, and showing it to the young secretary of the District Committee, who was sitting in the entrance to the Circus and registering those who came to the meeting. . . .

"Comrade Matusenko, Comrade Matusenko. . . . You at least are alive, Comrade Matusenko. . . . You at least they have not killed."

And Comrade Matusenko smiled with self-satisfaction:

"Why should they kill me? I am a small figure, unnoticeable, and have no enemies among my neighbours. My wife and I did not hear the shooting or anything else. . . . Just quietly slept through it in our beds, hee hee. . . . In the night she woke up and said, 'Iliusha, it sounds like shooting. . . .'

'Enough, Grusha,' says I, 'go to sleep, you're dreaming,' hee, hee. . . . And in the morning I listened and there actually was shooting. I waited at home till they stopped shooting and then went to the office. There was no one but me in the Politdep, but it's not for me to neglect my duties. . . ."

"What's to happen now, Comrade Matusenko? Comrades Simkova and Martuinov, both killed. . . ." Grief and affliction on the face of Matusenko: "I am orphaned, orphaned altogether. . . . There it is, popular ignorance and savagery. . . . And why are you here, do you intend to join the Party?" he asked Lisa patronisingly. . . . "Is that why you have come to our meeting?" And, hearing the sound of the bells calling to the Saturday evening service, Lisa thought of how she had not gone to church today, to Mass, but to the Party meeting. . . . And in general . . . she would not go to church . . . even at Easter . . . because there was no God.

And, occupied with these new ideas, she replied absent-mindedly to Matusenko:

"I have business with Comrade Karaulov. . . . I promised to meet him here."

Karaulov rode up on horseback to the Circus Building, jumped lightly from his horse, and tied it to the horse-post, while he kept looking down the road, watching far away the black ribbon of the train of carts. Some one laid a heavy hand on his shoulder and, looking round, he saw Gornuikh, broad-faced and calm, with a slight touch of weariness in his eyes, and his lips firmly pressed together.

"Are they bringing it?" Gornuikh asked shortly, pointing down the road.

"They are bringing it," Karaulov as shortly replied. And both were silent. They were remembering the twenty-eight comrades who were lying in their coffins, under the red flags, in the yard of the Extraordinary Commission, awaiting solemn burial.

"I'm sorry for the lads," said Karaulov abruptly. "Died for nothing. . . . And you

and I were right. . . . The battalion ought not to have been taken out of the town."

Gornuikh was silent, thinking, and then said, speaking as if he were piling heavy, uniform stones into a solid wall:

"No, Karaulov, we were both wrong. You see, there, they are bringing the wood. You just think," he added, with rare animation for him, "that wood gives us seed-corn! And corn, for peasant revolts, is like water for fire. Not for nothing the comrades died. . . Just now I am holding an enquiry and I see . . . the revolt was coming anyhow. . . ." And Gornuikh began briefly to tell him of the results of the enquiry.

Yesterday morning they had occupied the town. Only yesterday shots had been thundering in the streets, but now all those little houses seen from the hill looked so quiet and peaceable. But Gornuikh knew that yesterday's flame had been thrown up by them. He knew, and feared a new eruption, and was taking precautions against it. This fear had made him

instantly suppress the sobbing that had shaken him over Klimin's corpse, the sobbing caused by almost a week's lack of sleep and the most terrible nervous strain, take on the management of the enquiry, and, though he was not actually the senior of the surviving Tchekists, the direction of all the work of the Tcheka had somehow of its own accord fallen into his hands.

Few of the bandits left the town. The red-headed fellow, wounded during the seizure of the Communist Company's Headquarters, had been made prisoner, and Gornuikh confronted him with the other bandits, with the peasants from neighbouring villages who had been caught in the town and were now mild, timorous and dejected as if after a drunken headache, and had no difficulty in discovering in him one of the leaders of the revolt. And Gornuikh, who had already appointed the day and hour when he was to be shot, now promised him pardon, now threatened, now wheedled, and was tireless in the use of a thousand cun-

ning tricks of cross-examination. And sometimes it seemed to the red-headed one that he had fallen into the hands of an attentively quiet devil, or rather into the teeth of a merciless machine, one of those ingenious, precise, American machines which in ten minutes turn a living, squealing pig into a silent mound of sausages.

If Gornuikh was not himself cross-questioning, he was walking through the rooms of the investigators, not interfering, but following the questions, reading the protocols of the evidence, and now and again going off by himself to his office, where he shut himself up, sat there alone for a long time, propping his shaggy head on his hands, and apparently without a single thought, staring at the sheet of paper lying before him on the table, and now and again carefully, sparingly, writing down a word, another, as the course of the revolt became ever clearer and clearer to him. Now, in half a dozen sentences he told Karaulov the whole result of the many hours

of the minute labour of the enquiry. Suddenly Karaulov interrupted him:

"You see that girl standing there? She's a schoolmistress . . . went through a lot during the revolt and can tell you something of the murder of Robeiko. I told her to come to the meeting to meet you. There, standing by the entry. . . . Comrade Gratcheva, come here."

And Gornuikh saw the pale face of a girl, long straight locks of pale flaxen hair falling on forehead and cheeks, frightened blue eyes, and heard a trembling voice:

"I want to give evidence . . . about the murder of Comrade Robeiko. . . . I was present at it. I lived in the same flat as he, and. . . ." She began to tell of the appearance of Repin, so handsome, kindly and cunning, of Mr. and Mrs. Senator, and of her relations with them, of her wandering through the town during the night of the revolt. Now and again she went off into unnecessary details, and then Gornuikh gently and confidently asked

questions, and steered her story in the direction he needed. At first her shyness interfered with her talking, and she spoke disconnectedly, but afterwards she was more and more carried away, her voice grew more and more confident, and she even began timorously to gesticulate. When she told of the murder of Robeiko her eyes overflowed with tears. . . .

"Listen, Gornuikh," said Karaulov, when Gornuikh left Lisa, "I've been watching you just now and been amazed to see what a capable fellow you are. For example, how well and quietly you questioned that young lady. And then. . . . Do you know if it had not been for your fifty railwaymen they'd have taken the station and then . . . things would have been bad. Then I could have done nothing to help with my battalion. The liquidation of the revolt would have dragged out for a month. That's a fact. And how many more comrades would have died. . . ."

Then Karaulov said with shaking voice:

"You, now, are working like a horse, hurry-

ing everywhere, you are in the Tcheka, you are looking after the wood-getting, and have written an article for the paper besides. . . . But I . . . I can't do anything. As soon as I learned from that young lady that they had killed Robeiko, I saw red, turned into a wild beast and went for the bandits with my own sword. And then I learned that Ziman too, and Stalmakhov, and Klimin. . . . And Klimin and I went through the whole civil war together. . . . And now there's nothing for me to do. The town has become absolutely empty for me. Swear at the old man if you like, but remember, I am thirty years older than you. . . . And yesterday I got drunk from wretchedness. The thing is, I can't weep when sober. But get drunk a bit and it's as if some one opened your soul and you howl. Then you are ashamed, and after that you feel better. Wait and you'll find it out for yourself, and will remember old Karaulov. . . .Well, well. . . ."

Already the bell had tinkled, the room had

grown silent, and from the middle of the arena, stuttering and blushing, the secretary of the Town District Committee was proposing the election of a President. . . . A heavy, puzzled murmur rolled along the benches. Whom were they to elect, when the very best, the most staunch and capable were lying in coffins covered with red flags? Some one shouted the name of Klimin, some one doubtfully named Simkova. . . . But these names the secretary did not write down.

"Comrade Karaulov," came the thin, sugary voice of Matusenko. But Karaulov refused. . . . He did not know how to preside. Of that the comrades were well aware. Besides, today he was not well. . . .

And suddenly, from above, from the gallery, a strong voice threw the name:

"Gornuikh! . . . Comrade Gornuikh!"

And at once he was seconded from various sides:

"Right. . . . Gornuikh. . . . Comrade Gornuikh. . . ."

"Who is this Gornuikh?" several asked loudly.

And again from the gallery the same powerful voice proclaimed to the whole Circus:

"Gornuikh . . . the Tchekist. . . . Who came to us in the Depot, got us all on our feet and took command. . . . A fighting fellow."

It was the first time in his life that Gornuikh had had to preside over so large a meeting. . . . Gornuikh lost his head a little, did not know what to do, while the meeting, like a tamed beast of prey, lay submissively at his feet, grew quiet, and fixed its many-eyed gaze on him, its master. And instead of the common sentence, "I declare the meeting open" and the reading of the agenda for the day, from his tongue came other words, heavy and sharp, which entered into the consciousness of his audience, like nails into wood under the heavy blows of a hammer, words smelted and wrought by Gornuikh's strong judgment and determination during that critical week.

He told how grave had been the danger of

the revolt already past, and how the Communists were walking on thin ice, under which was surging the savage elemental force of the peasants, ready to drown and destroy the work of the Communists, how this elemental force must be tamed not only with bayonets and bullets but by the organization of socialistic exchange of goods between town and village.

"Comrades, it will be more difficult for us now. . . . In the Executive Committee nine are left, in the Party Committee four workers. In the Politdep both the Chiefs are gone, and in the Tcheka the President, Vice-President and three workers. The centre cannot send us reinforcements. There is little to be hoped from it. And the work has now become more complex. It's not enough to get seed-corn. We must get ready for the sowing campaign and carry it through over the whole of our trackless country. And the bandits are still not finally liquidated. It amounts to this, that we must carry heavier loads. Take me for example. I am now acting as President.

That is because we have no Klimin, no Robeiko, no Simkova, who would carry these duties out better. . . . So it will be everywhere, we must take on our shoulders the work of those who have been killed. It will be hard, but, if we remember their example, we shall manage it. . . ."

And then the "Internationale" was sung, and the meeting turned to questions of business, he guided it quietly, confidently and clear-sightedly, like the steersman of a heavily loaded barge in a winding, shallow stream. . . .

THE END

1.50

-,75